Cook's Country

NOVEMBER 2015

Easy One-Pan Pork Dinner

Puffy Tacos

Mustard Chicken

Two-Hour Roast Turkey
Start to Finish, No Kidding

Wisconsin Butter Burgers
Plus: Tasting Burger Buns

Cornmeal Drop Biscuits
Quick and Pantry-Friendly

Cooking Class: Apple Pie

Pork and Ricotta Meatballs
Lighter, Cleaner Flavor

Chocolate-Cherry Brownies
Solving the Texture Problem

Easy Breakfast Scrambles
Five Flavor Variations

Brussels Sprout Casserole
Rich and Creamy, Not Bitter

Rating Slicing Knives
Should You Buy One?

Roasting pork tenderloin, potatoes, and green beans all together in one pan seemed like a great idea for a weeknight dinner. After two weeks in the test kitchen, we figured out how to get it all cooked perfectly every time. PAGE 27

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Cook's Country

Dear Country Cook,

Every year at the Washington County Fair, the agricultural exhibits display vegetables dressed in various disguises: an ear of corn as a fashion model in a bikini, an eggplant as a fanged monster, and a butternut squash as a bird (the stem is the beak). Of course agriculture is a serious endeavor, and so this odd business of animating vegetables at harvest time is a puzzler.

Perhaps it is the one bit of fun we allow ourselves, as Puritan descendants, after the long growing season? Or maybe we view vegetables as living beings—after all, we did raise them up from the soil—and therefore want to give them a face?

The Vermont farmers I grew up with were, for the most part, serious people, but they were also fond of a practical joke. Shaking hands with an unsuspecting flatlander and then grabbing hold of an electric fence. Or tickling a sleeping farmhand on the nose with a stalk of timothy after having loaded up his outstretched hand with a pile of dried cow manure.

Farmers are serious people, to be sure, but sometimes, just sometimes, you do have to laugh. You might just say that it's the nature of things.

Cordially,

Christopher Kimball
Founder and Editor, Cook's Country

Getty Images

Cook's Country

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2015

Contents

TWO-HOUR TURKEY, 18

PUFFY TACOS, 8

DEEP-DISH APPLE PIE, 24

Features

4 Wisconsin Butter Burgers
Why should Wisconsin have all the fun? We wanted butter on our burgers, too.
PLUS Tasting Hamburger Buns

6 Pork and Ricotta Meatballs
For a fresher take on meatballs, boot the beef in favor of pork—and add ricotta cheese.

7 Spinach Salad with Gorgonzola and Pear
A punch of pear was just the thing to liven up this simple spinach salad.

8 Introducing Puffy Tacos
San Antonio's been enjoying these light, crisp taco shells in restaurants for years. Could we create a home version for the rest of us?

10 Pennsylvania Dutch Chicken-Corn Soup
Deep chicken and corn flavors make this soup delicious. *Rivels* make it memorable.

11 Spaghetti Squash Salad
Sure, you can toss it with butter (yawn) or pretend it's pasta (it's not). But we wanted a more flavorful approach.

12 Baked Mustard Chicken
We made 46 variations before we finally got the two best parts of this recipe—the mustard flavor and the crunchy breading—to play nice together.

13 Shrimp Creole
To create an authentic Creole dish without using every spice on the rack, we looked to the past for inspiration.

14 Cranberry–Sour Cream Pound Cake
Traditional pound cake is all about balance, so what happens when you throw two untraditional ingredients into the mix?

15 Chocolate-Cherry Brownies
Adding cherries to brownies seemed like a brilliant idea—until we sampled batch after batch of soggy brownies.

17 Steak Modiga
This St. Louis specialty features a juicy steak topped with crunchy bread crumbs and a buttery, cheese-enriched sauce.

18 Two-Hour Turkey
With two small cuts, we cooked a juicy roast turkey for the holidays in just 2 hours.
PLUS Testing Roasting Racks

20 Sourdough Dressing
Sourdough bread's characteristic tang and chewy texture liven up any sandwich. Our goal was to add the same punch in our holiday dressing.

21 Candied Sweet Potatoes
No more marshmallow topping. We were looking for balanced sweetness without the toothache.

22 Brussels Sprout Gratin
Brussels sprouts can send some folks running for the exit. We wanted our take to win over even the harshest skeptics.

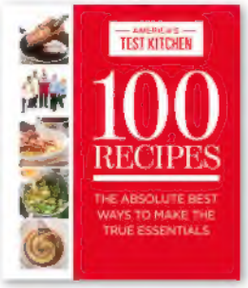
23 Cornmeal Drop Biscuits
Cornmeal should add flavor and a pleasant corny crunch to biscuits. Could we find the right formula for tasty, tender success?

Departments

2 ASK COOK'S COUNTRY
3 KITCHEN SHORTCUTS
16 GETTING TO KNOW **Leaveners**
24 COOKING CLASS **Deep-Dish Apple Pie**
26 COOKING FOR TWO **Chicken Tetrazzini**
27 ONE-PAN DINNER **Pork with Green Beans and Potatoes**
28 SLOW COOKER **Chicken with 40 Cloves of Garlic**
29 FIVE EASY RECIPES **Breakfast Scrambles**
30 EQUIPMENT REVIEW **Slicing Knives**
31 TASTE TEST **Preshredded Parmesan Cheese**
32 HEIRLOOM RECIPE **Bourbon Balls**
33 THE GREAT AMERICAN CAKE **B-52 Cake**

Just the Essentials

Do an Internet search for the word "recipe," and you'll get more than 50 million hits. Overwhelmed? Our new title, ***100 Recipes: The Absolute Best Ways to Make the True Essentials***, is the antidote: a focused collection of no-fail recipes designed to make you a master in the kitchen.



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AMERICA'S TEST KITCHEN
RECIPES THAT WORK®

America's Test Kitchen is a very real 2,500-square-foot kitchen located just outside Boston. It is the home of *Cook's Country* and *Cook's Illustrated* magazines and the workday destination of more than three dozen test cooks, editors, and cookware specialists. Our mission is to test recipes until we understand how and why they work and arrive at the best version. We also test kitchen equipment and supermarket ingredients in search of products that offer the best value and performance. You can watch us work by tuning in to *Cook's Country from America's Test Kitchen* (CooksCountry.com) and *America's Test Kitchen* (AmericasTestKitchen.com) on public television.

Ask Cook's Country

BY MORGAN BOLLING

Make-Ahead Mashed Potatoes

Can I make mashed potatoes ahead of time, freeze them, and then defrost and reheat them right before a big dinner?
Selma Clark, Detroit, Mich.

In order to find the answer to your question, we made five batches of our Creamy Mashed Potatoes (find the recipe at **CooksCountry.com/creamymashedpotatoes**), which are made with Yukon Gold potatoes, butter, heavy cream, and salt. We froze them and tried reheating them in a water bath, on the stovetop, and in the microwave at different power levels.

The most consistently successful technique was to freeze the mashed potatoes, covered with plastic wrap, in a microwave-safe bowl. When you're ready to reheat them, remove the plastic, cover the bowl with an overturned plate, and microwave the potatoes at 50 percent power, stirring occasionally. With a fully frozen batch of our Creamy Mashed Potatoes, this took 15 to 17 minutes. Next to a fresh batch of mashed potatoes, tasters noted that the thawed potatoes tasted somewhat less rich and luxurious, but overall they were very similar. And you could add richness back with a little cream or butter.

Note that when at room temperature the previously frozen potatoes can look soupy, but as they heat up, they will return to their original consistency. This is because the potato starches bond with water as they heat.

THE BOTTOM LINE: You can make and freeze your mashed potatoes in advance. Freeze them, covered, in a microwave-safe bowl and thaw them at 50 percent power in the microwave. And you may want to add a little extra butter.

DEFROSTED, ROOM TEMPERATURE
Looks like potato soup.

DEFROSTED AND HEATED
Please pass the gravy.

Sour Situation

I don't tend to keep sour cream on hand, but I always have Greek yogurt at home. In a pinch, can I substitute Greek yogurt for sour cream in recipes?
David Wilson, Albany, N.Y.

Greek yogurt and sour cream are both sour-tasting, thick dairy products, so it's not crazy to think they could be interchangeable. To test this, we tried Greek yogurt in our Sour Cream Drop Biscuits, in a sour cream–based horseradish sauce, and in beef stroganoff. In the biscuits and the cream sauce we thought that the Greek yogurt was a fine substitute; it felt slightly leaner than the sour cream in both applications, but overall it was acceptable. However, the Greek yogurt broke when it was added to the hot sauce in the beef stroganoff. While tasters said it was fine—albeit less rich—it was visually unappealing. The lower fat content of Greek yogurt is the reason it broke in the stroganoff. While 1 cup of sour cream has 40 grams of fat, the same amount of whole-fat Greek yogurt has only 11 grams of fat, making it much less stable when exposed to high heat.

THE BOTTOM LINE: In a pinch, go ahead and substitute whole-fat Greek yogurt for sour cream. Just be wary of using it in recipes that require high heat.

A Nutty Product

I've recently seen powdered peanut butter in the grocery store. What is it?
Gretta Everett, Santa Fe, N.M.

Powdered peanut butter is a byproduct of peanut oil production: Roasted peanuts are pressed to extract the peanut oil, and the leftover, defatted peanut bits are dried and ground into a powder, which can be reconstituted if desired.

We ordered four brands of powdered peanut butter and followed their package directions to reconstitute them with water. We matched these against our winning creamy peanut butter, Skippy, plain, in peanut butter cookies, in milkshakes, and in peanut butter sandwiches. Tasters were easily able to pick out the powdered varieties. The cookies were noticeably leaner. In the milkshakes, the peanut flavor was less pronounced, and the texture was decidedly chalky. The sandwiches, according to tasters, seemed like they were made with diet peanut butter. These comments made sense when we compared nutrition labels. While 2 tablespoons of Skippy have 190 calories and 16 grams of fat, 2 tablespoons of powdered peanut butter have about 45 calories and 1.5 grams of fat.

Knowing that peanut oil is removed from powdered peanut butter, we tried reconstituting the powder using peanut oil instead of water. It made the product much more similar to peanut butter.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Powdered peanut butter reconstituted with water, per manufacturers' instructions, tastes like a weak imitation of the real thing. It's much better when reconstituted with peanut oil.

How You Slice It

I just bought ham, and its label says, "Water Added." What does that mean, and why am I paying for added water?
Maris White, Creston, Ohio

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) grades cooked ham products. "Ham, Water Added" is one of the four categories used in classifying ham. The others are "Ham," "Ham with Natural Juices," and "Ham and Water Product."

Cooked ham is commonly wet-cured with a brining solution (often water, salt, phosphates or nitrates, and sugar). This makes the meat more seasoned and less likely to dry out when reheated at home. It also allows the producer to make more money by increasing the weight of the ham with water.

Officially, a cooked ham product is labeled by the percentage of protein by weight. The added water affects the weight: The more water you add, the lower the percentage of protein in the meat. The USDA bases its grading scale on this protein percentage.

THE BOTTOM LINE: "Ham, Water Added" is one of the four categories of cooked ham products as determined by the USDA. The labels stem from a process called "wet curing" in which ham is treated with a brining solution, affecting both its water and protein contents.

Ham	Ham with Natural Juices	Ham, Water Added	Ham and Water Product
At least 20.5% protein by weight	18.5% to 20.5% protein by weight	17% to 18.5% protein by weight	Less than 17% protein by weight
0% to 2% added water	7% to 8% added water	No more than 10% added water	More than 10% added water
$8.33 per lb	$6.00 per lb	$3.99 per lb	$2.49 per lb
Meatier, with the most flavor, but a little dry when cooked. Often has to be special-ordered.	Smoky and strongly pork-flavored. Saltier and moister than "Ham" and a favorite when cooked.	Dulled but still acceptable ham flavor. Very moist, which some tasters preferred but some thought felt rubbery.	Spongy, bouncy, salty, and processed-tasting.

Metallic Cheese

The other day I was out of plastic wrap and wrapped some cheese in aluminum foil. But when I unwrapped it, the cheese had several gray spots and I thought that it tasted metallic. What gives?
Helen Clapsaddle, Yakima, Wash.

Aluminum foil is much more highly reactive than paper and plastic (which are only slightly reactive) or stainless steel and glass (which are not at all reactive). This is especially an issue with acidic foods like tart fruits or cheese.

To store cheese, we suggest first wrapping it in waxed or parchment paper before wrapping it loosely in aluminum foil. The paper prevents any reaction or flavor transfer, and the foil helps prevents the cheese from losing moisture and drying out.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Aluminum foil can react with acidic foods like cheese if there is direct contact. To avoid this, wrap the cheese first in waxed or parchment paper and then loosely in foil.

To ask us a cooking question, visit **CooksCountry.com/ask**. Or write to Ask Cook's Country, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Just try to stump us!

Kitchen Shortcuts

COMPILED BY SCOTT KATHAN

SMART TRICK

More Juice

Scott Sullivan, Charlestown, Mass.

I have one of those hinged lime juicers—the kind where you open it, put in a halved lime, and squeeze it closed—that is a staple of my home bar. I've found I get more juice out of each fruit if I quarter, not halve, the limes. This trick is a lifesaver when I'm making margaritas for a crowd.

DOUBLE DUTY

Chimney Starter Hack

Larry Webster, Plano, Texas

A few weeks ago I was helping my friend break in his new charcoal grill—turns out he forgot to buy a chimney starter. I spotted one of those big rectangular olive oil cans in his recycling bin and cut out the top and bottom panels of the tin. I made a few vent holes on the sides near the bottom and stuffed it with crumpled newspaper and charcoal. The tin doesn't hold a lot of charcoal, so you have to add charcoal to the pile once it's lit, and since there's no handle, you have to move it with tongs. Still, it works pretty well.

SMART TIP

Improving the Oil

Jonathan Hayden, Dover, Del.

We eat a lot of salad in our house, always with homemade vinaigrette made with extra-virgin olive oil. When I ran out of extra-virgin a few weeks ago, I came up with an idea to improve the flavor of regular olive oil, which I keep around but don't use very much because I usually find it pretty bland. I ran a pitted kalamata olive through my garlic press and into the oil: The small bits of olive were undetectable in the dressed salad, but there was a strong olive flavor in the dressing.

NEAT TRICK

Bean Saver

Robin Burgess, Grants Pass, Ore.

Whenever I open a can of kidney or black beans, I find that many of the beans remain stuck to the bottom of the can. I've discovered that vigorously shaking the can before opening it helps release the beans from the bottom, so they all pour out together after I open the can.

WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

Celery Saver

Denise Muldoon, Warwick, R.I.

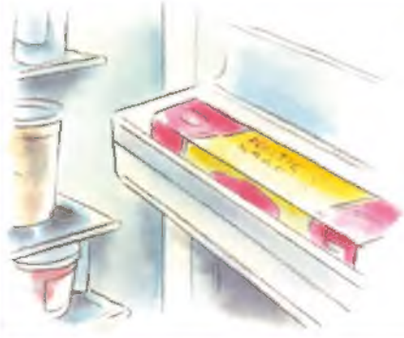
Most recipes that call for chopped celery make no mention of the leaves; most people just throw them out. I've found that the leaves have a ton of herby celery flavor. I store them in a plastic bag in the fridge and add a few to recipes that call for chopped celery, and it really boosts the flavor.

DOUBLE DUTY

Tortilla Cooker

Carole Berkoff, Carmen, Idaho

I don't have a microwave, but I love to cook with tortillas. I've discovered that I can use my panini maker to heat tortillas. I can do four at a time, and I can make them soft for tacos or (with a little oil and more time in the press) crisp enough for tostadas.



COOL TRICK

Chill Out

Amy Eckel, Biddeford, Maine

Whenever I try to cover a bowl or plate with plastic wrap, static electricity causes the wrap to cling to itself and make a mess of the job. There's an easy work-around: I keep the wrap in the door of my refrigerator. The humidity helps tame the static, and the plastic wrap is much easier to use.

Submit a tip online at **CooksCountry.com/kitchenshortcuts** or send a letter to Kitchen Shortcuts, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Include your name, address, and phone number. If we publish your tip, you will receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

Illustration: Ross MacDonald

Wisconsin Butter Burgers

Why should Wisconsin have all the fun?
We wanted butter on our burgers, too. BY ASHLEY MOORE

ARE YOU REALLY putting butter on a burger?"

Questions like this came at me every time I made a batch of Wisconsin butter burgers in the test kitchen. But the minute the skeptics tried a bite, they were persuaded that the folks over at Solly's Grille in Glendale (a suburb of Milwaukee) were doing something right. Since 1936, when Kenneth "Solly" Salmon opened the joint, they've been serving these burgers at all three meals every day—yep, some patrons even eat these for breakfast (see "On the Road").

The small restaurant consists of two yellow U-shaped counters, an open kitchen, and most important, a well-seasoned flattop grill. Grab a stool and watch the cooks pull the well-done, crispy-edged burgers from the griddle; stack them onto bun bottoms; and top each with a slice of American cheese, a small pile of stewed onions, and a toasted bun top that's been lavishly slathered with butter. Even before you grab one, you know that butter is destined to run down your chin in the most satisfying way.

I was determined to create these burgers in the test kitchen, no flattop required. I found a handful of recipes for butter burgers inspired by Solly's, but after cooking through a few of these, I determined that the test kitchen's tried-and-true recipe for the Best Old-Fashioned Burgers was my best inspiration for the burger base. I flattened each patty to ½ inch thick, sprinkled each with salt and pepper, and set them all in the fridge while I prepared the onions.

These "stewed" onions, softened and just barely taking on color (never caramelized), are a mandatory component. At Solly's, the onions are cooked slowly on the flattop grill, but I approximated their color and texture in a saucepan with a bit of water, salt, and, naturally, butter. I covered the pot to let them stew until soft and then removed the lid and allowed them to cook a little longer until they were just barely beginning to brown.

Onions done, I seared my patties in a hot skillet for 3 minutes on the first side without moving them—a crucial step for those crisp edges. After a flip, just 1 minute on the other side finished them off. (I set a slice of American cheese on each and tacked on 30 seconds to give it time to melt.) These burgers were ready for their toppings.

I stacked a burger on each lightly toasted bun bottom and piled on some onions. I spread each bun top with 2 tablespoons of softened salted butter (tasters preferred this to unsalted), capped each burger, and called my tasters. Together we huddled, hunched over our plates to prevent any butter dribbles, and devoured the burgers. Not one taster failed to ask for seconds.

In Milwaukee, they'll tell you that butter makes a burger better. And you know what? They're right.

When Ham Became Beef

Before World War II, according to late food historian Josh Ozersky, a "hamburger" could be most anything: beef, pork, sausage, you name it. But in 1946, the powerful beef lobby successfully petitioned the USDA to set strict pro-beef rules: To call your product "hamburger," it could contain only beef and beef fat. "Even the slightest bit of pork or pork fat disqualified it." The sweeping decree solidified beef's preeminence in the American marketplace; because White Castle and other chains had made hamburger the nation's top meat product, the move effectively "demoted pork to second-place (later third-place) status forever."

WISCONSIN BUTTER BURGERS

Serves 4

Our favorite domestic salted butter is Kate's Homemade.

- **9 tablespoons salted butter, softened**
- **1 onion, chopped**
- **1 tablespoon water**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **1 pound 90 percent lean ground beef**
- **4 hamburger buns, toasted**
- **½ teaspoon vegetable oil**
- **4 slices American cheese**

1. Melt 1 tablespoon butter in medium saucepan over medium heat. Add onion, water, and ¼ teaspoon salt and cook, covered, until tender, about 5 minutes. Remove lid and continue to cook until translucent and just beginning to brown, about 3 minutes. Cover and keep warm.

2. Transfer beef to rimmed baking sheet and separate into 4 equal mounds. Gently shape each mound into 4½-inch-wide by ½-inch-thick patty. Combine ¾ teaspoon salt and ¾ teaspoon pepper in bowl and sprinkle both sides of patties with mixture. Refrigerate until ready to cook, up to 30 minutes.

3. Spread 2 tablespoons butter onto each bun top; set aside. Heat oil in 12-inch skillet over high heat until just smoking. Using spatula, transfer patties to skillet and cook without moving them for 3 minutes. Flip patties and cook for 1 minute. Top each burger with 1 slice of American cheese and continue to cook until cheese is melted, about 30 seconds longer.

4. Transfer burgers to bun bottoms. Divide onion mixture among burgers and cover with buttered bun tops. Serve immediately.

Want some fries with that? Visit **CooksCountry.com/frozenfrytasting** to read our tasting of frozen French fries.

On the Road

Solly's Grille, Milwaukee

The gold standard of butter burgers can be found at Solly's Grille in Glendale, Wisconsin. From the outside, the restaurant looks more like a new-construction home than old-fashioned diner (according to George Motz, author of *Hamburger America*, the original 1936 Solly's was relocated in 2000 to make room for, of all things, an outpatient heart clinic), but the yellow laminate countertops and milkshake machines confirm: This is a diner, and burgers are served all day.

Though other outlets serve variations on butter burgers (including the regional fast food chain Culver's), true butter burger aficionados seek out Solly's for owner Glenn Fieber's thin, crisp-edged burgers under salty American cheese, creamy stewed onions, and a shameless slather of Wisconsin butter. Fieber is modest but proud of his burgers, saying only as much as needs to be said; when I asked what he puts in the stewed onions that come on every burger, he replied, "I just told you. Stewed onions." For more on our trip to Milwaukee, visit **CooksCountry.com/fieldnotesmilwaukee**.

–BRYAN ROOF

KEY STEPS To Making Butter Burgers

Here are the three essential steps for making these Wisconsin favorites.

1. COOK ONIONS

"Stew" the onions in butter and water in a covered saucepan. Then remove the lid and brown them.

2. BUTTER BUNS

Slather 2 tablespoons of softened salted butter onto each bun top.

3. SEAR BURGERS

Cook the burgers hard and fast to create a flavorful dark brown crust.

WHICH BURGER BUN IS THE BEST?

We want soft, not soggy.

When it comes to hamburgers, the patty tends to hog all the glory—but we think a great burger deserves an equally great bun. To find the best, we asked 21 America's Test Kitchen staffers to taste four top-selling products plain and with hamburgers.

What separates a good bun from a great bun? First, subtle flavor that doesn't overpower the patty. Burgers generally have a hearty dose of salt, so tasters preferred buns with minimal sodium and a dash of sweetness.

We preferred slightly wider buns with at least a 3.5-inch diameter, which comfortably accommodated moderately sized patties. One lower-ranked product was only 3.35 inches wide and our 4-ounce burgers hung awkwardly off its sides. What's more, buns with bottoms that were less than ½ inch thick turned soggy under the weight of the burger.

But the key component was texture. Though every product was tender, one product took the crown for being the fluffiest and moistest of the bunch. Its secret? While traditional hamburger buns use water to hydrate the dough, Martin's Sandwich Potato Rolls replace the water with potato flakes, milk, and butter (essentially mashed potatoes). Potatoes are rich in starches that prevent tough, chewy proteins from forming in the bun. The result? A bun with a delicate crumb that is moist but still extremely fluffy.

Though the second-most-popular hamburger bun brand in the country, Martin's is found primarily on supermarket shelves in the eastern United States. Fortunately, these buns can be ordered online and stored in the freezer. Our tasters noticed no measurable difference in flavor or texture between a bun that was thawed and one that was fresh, but if you'd rather buy from the store and can't find Martin's, Pepperidge Farm White Hamburger Buns are a good backup choice.

–LAUREN SAVOIE

RECOMMENDED		TASTERS' NOTES
MARTIN'S Sandwich Potato Rolls **Price:** $3.69 for 8 buns ($0.46 per bun) **Sodium:** 170 mg **Sugar:** 4.72 g **Height of Bun Top:** 0.9 in **Height of Bun Bottom:** 0.9 in **Diameter:** 3.5 in		"This is my ideal bun," said one taster about our winning product, which is made with potato starch for a "soft," "moist" crumb. Tasters loved the "tender," "fluffy" texture of these buns and thought that their "rich" sweetness nicely "complemented the saltiness of the burger." Though a top-selling product, it is primarily available in East Coast grocery stores or online.
PEPPERIDGE FARM White Hamburger Buns **Price:** $2.99 for 8 buns ($0.37 per bun) **Sodium:** 205 mg **Sugar:** 3.92 g **Height of Bun Top:** 0.7 in **Height of Bun Bottom:** 0.5 in **Diameter:** 3.6 in		These "soft," "squishy" buns condensed easily to "hug the burger," and their wide, thin shape made for a "good ratio of bun to patty" in each bite. Tasters thought that this product was "slightly sweet" and had a "nice honey-like aftertaste."
ARNOLD'S White Hamburger Buns **Price:** $3.69 for 8 buns ($0.46 per bun) **Sodium:** 220 mg **Sugar:** 3.51 g **Height of Bun Top:** 0.8 in **Height of Bun Bottom:** 0.4 in **Diameter:** 3.5 in		These "soft," "buttery" buns had big, "pillowy" tops and a "doughy," Wonder Bread–like texture. Tasters liked that this "airy" product compressed nicely for easy eating, though a few lamented that the "thinner" bottoms "quickly sogged out" from burger juices.
BALL PARK Hamburger Buns **Price:** $2.50 for 8 buns ($0.31 per bun) **Sodium:** 240 mg **Sugar:** 4 g **Height of Bun Top:** 0.9 in **Height of Bun Bottom:** 0.6 in **Diameter:** 3.35 in		This product was "slightly sweet" with a "light," "airy" crumb and "firmer," "chewier" crust. A few tasters noted that larger patties dwarfed these slightly smaller buns. Most deemed this product "perfectly acceptable for any cookout."

All serving sizes were adjusted to 50 grams. Nutritional information was recalculated accordingly.

Pork and Ricotta Meatballs

For a fresher take on meatballs, boot the beef in favor of pork—and add ricotta cheese. BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

WHAT'S NOT TO love about meatballs? They are staples in cuisines around the world. And the variations—meats, seasonings, binders—are endless. During a recent perusal of Italian cookbooks, I was reminded of an old trick for extra-tender meatballs: adding ricotta cheese.

Most meatball recipes include a mixture of milk and bread. Called a panade, this combination adds moisture to the mix and helps the meatballs stay tender. So why not ricotta cheese instead of milk? And why not all pork instead of a mix of meats? The combination of sweet, mild ground pork and fluffy, creamy ricotta suggested a meatball delicate in flavor and texture. I couldn't wait to give it a try. I quickly discovered a wealth of existing recipes to use for inspiration.

I gathered a handful of these recipes and got to work in the test kitchen. Many of them were fine (if not spectacular), but even the failures were instructive—I learned, for instance, that too much garlic nixed any porky flavors, that substituting chopped shallot for traditional onion helped highlight the meat's natural sweetness, and that sharp flavors like orange peel, which I found in a Sicilian-inspired recipe, were far too dominant a flavor for these comforting meatballs. Using what I'd learned, as well as past experience in the test kitchen, I stitched together a working recipe for pork and ricotta meatballs: a starting point.

To bolster the flavor of the pork, I added garlic, shallot, and Parmesan (not too much, as I didn't want to overwhelm the other flavors). Some chopped parsley and lemon zest provided a fresh note. I mixed in an egg and some fresh bread crumbs and formed balls. I seared a batch in a skillet, finishing them by pouring over some jarred tomato sauce (I'd work on the real thing later) and simmering until the meatballs were cooked through.

The results were impressive: These meatballs were tender, juicy, and flavorful, and they had an unexpected lightness that my tasters loved.

Why so tender and light? I asked our science editor to explain. He explained that the water in ricotta is tightly trapped in coagulated protein, so it doesn't leach out and make the bread crumbs soggy. Plus, the ricotta doesn't dissolve inside the meatballs, which means it forms lots of little barriers that keep the meat proteins from binding into a dense, tough ball. The result? An uncommonly tender meatball.

Chopped fresh basil adds a burst of flavor and color to the finished meatballs.

What's more, the ricotta added a savory richness that provoked comments of "More, please."

Traditional recipes often call for pan-frying the meatballs as I had done before adding the sauce, but this method can make a greasy mess of the stovetop. I found that assembling the meatballs on a wire rack set in a rimmed baking sheet and roasting them in the oven was an easier, cleaner option—elevating the meatballs this way allowed air to circulate around them, producing evenly browned (but still not fully cooked) meatballs in about 30 minutes. Plus, using the oven meant that I could double my recipe without having to brown the balls in batches.

Jarred tomato sauce has its merits, but I wanted a brighter, fresher take here. I kept things simple by gently cooking smashed garlic cloves in extra-virgin olive oil until just golden brown to infuse the sauce with subtle garlic flavor. I added some red pepper flakes and crushed tomatoes to the golden garlic and gently simmered the mixture while the meatballs browned in the oven.

The sauce reduced slightly, bringing out the tomatoes' natural sweetness.

To finish the dish, I transferred the browned meatballs to my big pot of sauce and baked them at 300 degrees for 30 minutes so the flavors could meld. Gently braising the meatballs in the sauce made them even more tender and infused the sauce with sweet, meaty flavor. It also made the kitchen smell terrific.

PORK AND RICOTTA MEATBALLS

Serves 6 to 8

It takes about 10 minutes of occasional mashing with a fork for the ricotta to fully wet the bread enough for the panade to achieve the desired paste consistency. Use a greased ¼-cup dry measuring cup or equal-size portion scoop to divvy up the meatballs, and use slightly wet hands when shaping them to minimize sticking. This recipe makes enough sauce to coat 1½ pounds of pasta.

MEATBALLS

- **4 slices hearty white sandwich bread, crusts removed, torn into small pieces**
- **8 ounces (1 cup) whole-milk ricotta cheese**
- **2 pounds ground pork**
- **1 ounce Parmesan cheese, grated (½ cup), plus extra for serving**
- **½ cup chopped fresh parsley**
- **2 large eggs**
- **2 shallots, minced**
- **4 garlic cloves, minced**
- **1 tablespoon salt**
- **1½ teaspoons pepper**
- **1 teaspoon grated lemon zest**

SAUCE

- **¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- **10 garlic cloves, smashed and peeled**
- **1 teaspoon red pepper flakes**
- **2 (28-ounce) cans crushed tomatoes**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil**

1. FOR THE MEATBALLS: Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Set wire rack in aluminum foil–lined rimmed baking sheet and spray evenly with vegetable oil spray. Combine bread and ricotta in large bowl and let sit, mashing occasionally with fork, until smooth paste forms, about 10 minutes.

2. Add pork, Parmesan, parsley, eggs, shallots, garlic, salt, pepper, and lemon zest to bread mixture and mix with your hands until thoroughly combined. Divide meat mixture into 24 portions (about ¼ cup each) and place on platter. Roll meat between your wet hands to form meatballs and space evenly on prepared wire rack. Roast meatballs until browned, 30 to 35 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through roasting. Remove from oven and reduce oven temperature to 300 degrees.

3. FOR THE SAUCE: Meanwhile, combine oil and garlic in Dutch oven set over low heat and cook until garlic is soft and golden on all sides, 12 to 14 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add pepper flakes and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in tomatoes and 1 teaspoon salt. Cover, with lid slightly ajar, and bring to simmer over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until sauce has thickened slightly, about 30 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

4. Nestle meatballs into sauce, cover, and transfer pot to oven. Bake until meatballs are tender and sauce has thickened, about 30 minutes. Transfer meatballs and sauce to serving platter. Sprinkle with basil and serve, passing extra Parmesan separately.

INGREDIENT SPOTLIGHT **Ricotta**

Ricotta is a moist, semi-solid cheese made from whey and milk. For these meatballs, we mash ricotta with small pieces of bread until the mixture, called a panade, is smooth. Since the ricotta is thicker than the milk usually used in panades, we found that it works best to mash occasionally over a 10-minute period until the panade is totally smooth. The ricotta adds richness and helps keep the meatballs moist and tender.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE

Roast and Then Braise in Sauce

During our testing we found that a two-stage cooking process was the easiest way to guarantee tasty, tender meatballs. First, we roast the meatballs on a wire rack set in a rimmed baking sheet to brown them evenly—all in one batch—without making a mess of the stovetop. Then, we finish cooking the meatballs in the sauce, where the savory flavors meld and marry.

Spinach Salad with Gorgonzola and Pear

A punch of pear was just the thing to liven up this simple spinach salad. BY KATIE LEAIRD

SPINACH SALAD IS an appealing idea: a deep green, fresh-tasting toss. But often the dressing is too aggressive, overwhelming the delicate, fresh flavor of the spinach—or too wimpy, leaving you with nothing but a mouthful of spinach. I was determined to create a balanced, vibrant salad suitable for the holiday table.

Walnuts, blue cheese, and pears were the ingredients I set out, hoping that they'd elevate these humble baby leaves (which we prefer to less-tender curly leaves) into a holiday-worthy dish. The first two ingredients needed very little help: Lightly toasting the walnuts would bring out their flavor, and a nice wedge of Gorgonzola would add creaminess, savoriness, and tang. So I turned my focus to the pears.

If your pears aren't quite ripe, they'll be mealy. If they are overripe, they'll just squish. But a just-right ripe pear, one that gives slightly at the base of the stem when you press your thumb into it, is glorious. (When in doubt at the grocery store, choose pears that are slightly less ripe and let them sit for a day or two in a brown paper bag that you've folded over at the top.)

In addition to scattering slices on top of each salad, I blended half a pear into the vinaigrette. The added sweetness from the fresh fruit, along with red wine vinegar, shallots, mustard, and oil, gave me a balanced dressing that highlighted the grassy, slightly mineraly flavor of the spinach. A sprinkle of ruby-red pomegranate seeds added a little holiday flair.

Pomegranate seeds add a pop of bright flavor and color to this fall salad.

SPINACH SALAD WITH GORGONZOLA AND PEAR

Serves 4

To make a smooth dressing, be sure the pear is completely ripe. Make sure to use baby, not curly, spinach here.

- **1 ripe Anjou pear, halved and cored**
- **3 tablespoons red wine vinegar**
- **1 tablespoon minced shallot**
- **1 teaspoon Dijon mustard**
- **1 teaspoon packed brown sugar**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **¼ cup canola oil**
- **1 tablespoon lemon juice**
- **8 ounces (8 cups) baby spinach**
- **3 ounces Gorgonzola cheese, crumbled (¾ cup)**
- **½ cup walnuts, toasted and chopped coarse**
- **¼ cup pomegranate seeds**

1. Cut 1 pear half into large chunks and place in food processor. Add vinegar, shallot, mustard, sugar, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper and process until smooth, about 15 seconds. With processor running, slowly pour in oil and process until emulsified, about 30 seconds.

2. Thinly slice remaining pear half crosswise, toss with lemon juice, and set aside. Toss spinach and ½ cup dressing together in large bowl. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Divide salad among individual plates and top each with Gorgonzola, walnuts, pomegranate seeds, and sliced pear. Drizzle remaining ¼ cup dressing over top. Serve.

Introducing Puffy Tacos

San Antonio's been enjoying these light, crisp taco shells in restaurants for years. Could we create a home version for the rest of us? BY MORGAN BOLLING

RESIDENTS OF SAN Antonio, Texas, have strong feelings about puffy tacos—deep-fried, light, crisp, emphatically corn-flavored shells that encase savory meat fillings. They're a regional take on tacos that deserves a spot on menus, and in home kitchens, everywhere.

Many San Antonio fans of the dish cite Diana Barrios-Treviño's restaurant, Los Barrios, as having the best in the city. So when our executive food editor, Bryan Roof, was in San Antonio last year, he visited Barrios-Treviño to see her technique firsthand. As you might expect, Barrios-Treviño starts with fresh *masa de maíz*, finely ground hominy, to create a moist masa dough. She uses a tortilla press to stamp portions of masa dough into 6-inch tortillas and then drops them one at a time into the deep-fryer. The tortillas puff up with air, ballooning as Barrios-Treviño flips and shapes them with two spatulas into the familiar taco-shell shape—except a bit puffier. She pulls the shells from the oil to drain upside down before stuffing them with a simple ground meat filling.

Back in the test kitchen, with Roof's guidance, I started to put together a working recipe. I knew this recipe would have a few steps: I'd be making a dough and frying taco shells, plus creating a filling. But I wanted to make it as simple as possible. Since fresh masa is not available in most grocery stores, I made a dough using much more widely available masa harina (dried masa), salt, and water (see "Masa Harina"). Rather than use a tortilla press, I pressed out disks using a clear pie plate; this simple technique produced a tortilla of even thickness and was easier and more consistent than using a rolling pin. And since you can see through the plate, it's easy to gauge when you have a perfect 6-inch disk.

I brought some oil to 375 degrees in a Dutch oven (our go-to frying vessel in the test kitchen) and dropped in a masa disk. It puffed just as expected. But when I flipped it, the bottom burst and the shell split in two. I attempted again with both lower and higher oil temperatures but had the same issue.

Realizing that I needed some expert advice, I reached out to Barrios-Treviño, who told me I probably had too much water in my dough. When frying, the heat of the oil rapidly pushes water out of the masa dough. The excess water was converting to steam rapidly, causing the shells to puff so much that they exploded. After a series of tests, I found the balance. A ratio of 1⅔ cups water to 2½ cups masa harina was the sweet spot for a workable dough that didn't explode.

I was using a hefty 3 quarts of oil to be able to fully submerge the shells in a Dutch oven. But manipulating the shells in the deep Dutch oven was an awkward process. Would a shallower vessel make the process easier? I tried 2 cups of oil in an 8-inch skillet to see if shallow frying would be a feasible option, but the oil splattered and the oil temperature dropped almost 100 degrees after I added each tortilla. I switched to a large saucepan; by doing so I could get away with using just 2 quarts of oil, and the saucepan's smaller profile made shaping the tacos easier.

A favorite filling for San Antonio puffy tacos is a Texas take on *picadillo*—browned ground beef cooked with potatoes, onion, and green peppers and flavored with garlic, cumin, salt, and black pepper. I lined up 12 crisp, light puffy taco shells; stuffed them with my picadillo; and topped them with shredded lettuce, cheese, and tomatoes. Tasters tore into them with unbridled pleasure.

Our from-scratch fried taco shells contain only three ingredients: masa harina, salt, and water. They're worth every minute it takes to make them.

PUFFY TACOS Serves 6 to 8

We used Maseca Brand Instant Masa Corn Flour for our taco shells. The dough should not be sticky and should have the texture of Play-Doh. If the dough cracks or falls apart when pressing the tortillas, just reroll and press again.

PICADILLO

- **12 ounces 85 percent lean ground beef**
- **½ russet potato (4 ounces), peeled and cut into ¼-inch pieces**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **1 onion, chopped fine**
- **1 small green bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and chopped fine**
- **3 garlic cloves, minced**
- **1½ teaspoons ground cumin**
- **2 teaspoons all-purpose flour**
- **¾ cup water**

TACO SHELLS

- **2½ cups (10 ounces) masa harina**
- **1 teaspoon salt**
- **1⅔ cups warm water**
- **2 quarts vegetable oil**

Shredded iceberg lettuce
Chopped tomato
Shredded sharp cheddar cheese
Hot sauce

1. FOR THE PICADILLO: Combine beef, potato, 1 teaspoon pepper, and ¾ teaspoon salt in 12 inch nonstick skillet. Cook over medium high heat until meat and potatoes begin to brown, 6 to 8 minutes, breaking up meat with spoon. Add onion and bell pepper and cook until softened, 4 to 6 minutes. Add garlic and cumin and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

2. Stir in flour and cook for 1 minute. Stir in water and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium low and simmer until thickened slightly, about 1 minute. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Remove from heat, cover, and keep warm.

3. FOR THE TACO SHELLS: Mix masa harina and salt together in medium bowl. Stir in warm water with rubber spatula. Using your hands, knead mixture in bowl until it comes together fully (dough should be soft and tacky, not sticky), about 30 seconds. Cover dough with damp dish towel and let rest for 5 minutes.

4. Divide dough into 12 equal portions, about ¼ cup each, then roll each into smooth ball between your hands. Transfer to plate and keep covered with damp dish towel. Cut sides of 1 gallon zipper-lock bag, leaving bottom seam intact.

5. Set wire rack in rimmed baking sheet and line rack with triple layer of paper towels. Add oil to large saucepan until it measures 2½ inches deep and heat over medium high heat to 375 degrees.

6. When oil comes to temperature, enclose 1 dough ball at a time in split bag. Using clear pie plate (so you can see size of tortilla), press dough flat into 6 inch circle (about ⅛ inch thick).

7. Carefully remove tortilla from plastic and drop into hot oil. Fry tortilla until it puffs up, 15 to 20 seconds. Using 2 metal spatulas, carefully flip tortilla. Immediately press down in center of tortilla with 1 spatula to form taco shape, submerging tortilla into oil while doing so. Using second spatula, spread top of tortilla open about 1½ inches. Fry until golden brown, about 60 seconds. Adjust burner, if necessary, to maintain oil temperature between 350 and 375 degrees.

8. Transfer taco shell to prepared rack and place upside down to drain. Return oil to 375 degrees and repeat with remaining dough balls.

9. Divide picadillo evenly among taco shells, about ¼ cup each. Serve immediately, passing lettuce, tomato, cheddar, and hot sauce separately.

The American Table
Puffy, Crisp, Crunchy, Crumbly

Ask an outsider about San Antonio's charms, and you'll likely hear about the downtown Riverwalk, the vibrant nightlife and of course, the iconic Alamo. But ask a local and you'll get an earful about puffy tacos.

The ubiquitous tacos are so important here that the mascot for the San Antonio Missions minor league baseball team is (yes) Henry the Puffy Taco. But until prefab taco shells became the national Tex-Mex norm in the 1960s, most tacos in South Texas were of a similar puffy ilk. Cooks in Houston, Corpus Christi, Austin, and many other, smaller south Texas towns have been dropping fresh tortillas into frying oil and forming them into pockets for ground meat fillings for generations, sometimes calling them "crispy" or "crunchy" tacos—both equally apt descriptors.

Or they just call them tacos. When author Robb Walsh sampled a version at Cano's Restaurant in Rio Grande City on the Texas-Mexico border a decade ago, owner Juan Cano told him, "Up in San Antonio they are making a big deal about puffy tacos. I say: 'What's the difference? We have always made them this way.'" Read about our recent trip to Texas at **CooksCountry.com/fieldnotessanantonio**

Top: The Alamo. Bottom: Henry the Puffy Taco rallies baseball fans.

MASA HARINA
Tortilla base

KEY INGREDIENT **Masa Harina**

Masa harina, also called dried masa flour on some supermarket labels, is the base ingredient for most home-kitchen tortilla recipes. The direct translation is "dough flour," which makes sense when you understand how it's made: Dried corn kernels are soaked in an alkaline solution to remove the hulls and then ground into a dough, called masa. This dough is then washed, dried again, and powdered into fine-grained flour that, when mixed with warm water and salt, makes a simple tortilla dough. You can find masa harina in the Mexican foods section of your local grocery store.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE **Creating Puffy Taco Shells**

After mixing the dough, dividing it into 12 equal balls, and setting up the draining rack, heat the oil to 375 degrees. Then begin shaping and frying the dough.

1. Cut open the sides of a 1-gallon zipper-lock bag and place a ball of dough inside. Fold the plastic over the top.

2. Press down on plastic with a clear pie plate to flatten each ball into a 6-inch circle. It should be ⅛ inch thick.

3. Lower the tortilla into the hot oil. Don't splash, and watch carefully: In about 15 to 20 seconds, the tortilla will begin to puff up in the middle.

4. Use two metal spatulas to grip the tortilla and flip it over in the oil. Be gentle here: You don't want to pierce or tear the tortilla.

5. Use spatulas to shape the tortilla into a taco shell with a wide mouth. Nudge shell down into the oil and fry until golden brown.

Illustration: Lauren Pettapiece. The Alamo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS TEX 15-SANT 15--5. Henry: Shawn Davis

Pennsylvania Dutch Chicken-Corn Soup

Deep chicken and corn flavors make this soup delicious. *Rivels* make it memorable. BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

With satisfying flavors and hearty, stick-to-your-ribs feel, chicken corn soup is typical of Pennsylvania Dutch recipes. The soup is traditionally made by simmering a whole chicken for hours to create a rich broth in which to showcase the sweet, tender bite of local corn kernels. But what really makes it special are its tiny *rivels*, a cross between dumplings and German spaetzle, which add an unexpected chewy component. As a girl, I spent many a Saturday afternoon watching my grandmother make this soup in her central Pennsylvania home. I wanted to capture all the slow-cooked flavor and texture I remembered without devoting an entire day to the process.

Re-creating the soup with an eye toward efficiency meant starting with chicken parts instead of a whole bird. I decided to go with bone-in, skin-on breasts and thighs, which provided a nice mix of light and dark meat. Since I didn't need to brown the chicken, I discarded the skin before cooking to prevent the broth from becoming greasy. To build long-cooked flavor without overcooking the lean white meat, I started by sautéing onion and celery, pouring in chicken broth, and then poaching the thighs—only adding the chicken breasts after the thighs were partially cooked (since thighs take longer). This technique yielded meat that was perfectly moist and a reinforced broth that tasted as if it had been simmering for hours.

Because corn is so important to this soup, I wanted to find a way to deepen the corn flavor. I departed from tradition and added the stripped cobs to the broth while the chicken poached; then I added the kernels to cook for the last 15 minutes to keep the flavor fresh. But this short cooking time left the kernels too starchy and firm. Extending the cooking time to 25 minutes yielded more tender corn. To get at even more of the flavor inside the corn kernels, I grated two of the four ears I was using on the large holes of a box grater; this had the added advantage of releasing starch that helped thicken this hearty soup.

The chicken and corn may pack all the flavor in this soup, but the dense, chewy rivels supply the texture that made my tasters go back for a second bowl. Traditional recipes call for a ratio of 2 cups flour to 2 eggs and no additional milk or water to loosen the dough, making it quite dry and very hard to work together. The drier the rivels, the more they disintegrated into the soup, leaving me with floury sludge. I eased back on the flour to 1¼ cups, at which point I could easily work together the flour and egg (and some minced chives for added flavor). But the rivels were still a little tough. Letting the dough rest while I prepared the soup was the answer; this extra time gave the dough a chance to relax.

When my soup was done, I stirred in some fresh parsley and topped each bowl with chopped hard-cooked egg, a traditional garnish that adds richness and texture.

This homey soup is studded with pleasantly chewy rivels, small dumplings pinched from a flour, egg, and chive dough and poached in the pot.

PENNSYLVANIA DUTCH CHICKEN AND CORN SOUP

Serves 6

Fresh corn kernels (plus the stripped cobs) give this soup its flavor; do not substitute frozen corn. Our favorite store-bought broth is Swanson Chicken Stock. Note that the chicken thighs and breast are added to the soup at different points. This soup cooks for about 90 minutes.

- 1¼ cups (6¼ ounces) all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh chives
- Salt and pepper
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten, plus 2 hard-cooked large eggs, chopped
- 4 ears corn, husks and silk removed
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 onion, chopped fine
- 2 celery ribs, chopped fine
- 8 cups chicken broth
- 2 (5- to 7-ounce) bone-in chicken thighs, skin removed, trimmed
- 1 (10- to 12-ounce) bone-in split chicken breast, skin removed, trimmed
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley

1. Combine flour, chives, and ¾ teaspoon salt in bowl. Form well in center and add beaten eggs. Using fork, slowly work flour into eggs, using your hands when stirring becomes difficult. (Dough will be very firm.) Knead dough on lightly floured counter until smooth, about 1 minute. Return dough to bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let sit at room temperature while assembling soup.

Spaghetti Squash Salad

Sure, you can toss it with butter (yawn) or pretend it's pasta (it's not). But we wanted a more flavorful approach. BY ASHLEY MOORE

SPAGHETTI SQUASH IS making a comeback. This squash, whose cooked flesh scrapes into noodle like strands, is now showing up on trendy restaurant menus and piled high in bins at the supermarket. While some insist on positioning its string like strands as a vegetable alternative to pasta, I wanted to meet this squash on its own merits and create an unexpected, fresh tasting, room temperature salad that would highlight its grassy, nutty sweetness.

With this direction in mind, I began my testing with the cooking method. Boiling introduced too much liquid and gave me soggy squash. Roasting held more promise, and after playing with various oven temperatures, cook ing times, and precooking preparations, I zeroed in on the best technique: I cut the squash in half lengthwise, removed the seeds, positioned it cut side down on a baking sheet (to maximize brown ing), and let it ride in a 375 degree oven for 40 to 45 minutes. This gave me soft, non soggy strings of squash with just a hint of caramelization

Once the squash halves had cooled for about an hour, I took a fork to their interiors and began to scrape out the flesh into individual strands. The strands were tender but firm enough to hold their shape. Even better, they didn't release any excess liquid. The delicate but distinct nutty, squashy flavor stood out. I had a fine base with which to build a salad.

I wanted this salad to feature light, nutty flavors to echo the flavor of the squash, so I went in a Mediter ranean direction. I tossed the squash with some chickpeas, salty feta cheese, chopped parsley, chopped scallions, and toasted pistachios. A fresh lemon vinai grette added a final note of brightness.

SPAGHETTI SQUASH SALAD WITH CHICKPEAS AND FETA

Serves 4 to 6

Plan ahead: The squash needs to cool for 1 hour after roasting.

- **1 (2½-pound) spaghetti squash, halved lengthwise and seeded**
- **6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **2 teaspoons grated lemon zest plus 7 teaspoons juice**
- **1 (15-ounce) can chickpeas, rinsed**
- **2 ounces feta cheese, crumbled (½ cup)**
- **½ cup coarsely chopped fresh parsley**
- **4 scallions, sliced thin on bias**
- **2 tablespoons chopped toasted pistachios**

1. Adjust oven rack to middle posi tion and heat oven to 375 degrees. Brush cut sides of squash with 2 tablespoons oil and season with salt and pepper. Place squash, cut side down, on rimmed baking sheet. Roast squash until just tender and tip of paring knife can easily be slipped into flesh, 40 to 45 minutes. Transfer squash to wire rack, cut side up, and let cool com pletely, about 1 hour.

2. Combine lemon zest and juice, remaining ¼ cup oil, ½ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in large bowl. Holding squash over bowl, use fork to scrape flesh from skin into strands, discard skin.

3. Add chickpeas to bowl with squash and toss gently to coat with dressing. Transfer to serving platter and sprinkle with feta, parsley, scallions, and pistachios. Drizzle with extra oil before serving.

Visit **CooksCountry.com/nov15** for two variations: one with radishes and queso fresco, the other with tomatoes and Pecorino.

Chickpeas and feta cheese add substance and flavor to this hearty room-temperature salad

TEST KITCHEN TIP
Leave No Corn Flavor Behind

Using fresh, sweet corn on the cob is essential for this recipe, and we dig deep to make the most of it. Slicing the kernels from two cobs and grating the kernels off two more give us great flavor and a nice range of textures, but we don't stop there. The bare cobs don't look like much, but they have a lot to offer. Before tossing the stripped cobs, we steep them in the broth to draw out every bit of their deepest, earthiest, corniest essence.

DON'T TOSS THOSE COBS

2. Cut kernels from 2 ears corn, transfer to bowl, and reserve cobs. Grate remaining 2 ears corn on large holes of box grater over same bowl, reserve cobs.

3. Melt butter in Dutch oven over medium high heat. Add onion, celery, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper and cook until lightly browned, 5 to 7 minutes. Add broth, chicken thighs, and reserved cobs and bring to boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer, partially covered, for 25 minutes. Add chicken breast and continue to simmer until breast registers 160 degrees, about 20 minutes longer.

4. Remove pot from heat; discard cobs. Transfer chicken to plate and let cool slightly. Pinch off pea size pieces of dough and drop into soup. Stir in corn kernel mixture and bring soup to boil over high heat. Reduce heat to low and simmer, partially covered, until corn is just tender, about 25 minutes, stirring occasionally to keep rivels from sticking to bottom of pot.

5. Using 2 forks, shred chicken into bite size pieces; discard bones. Stir shredded chicken into soup and cook until warmed through, 3 to 5 minutes. Stir in parsley and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve, topped with hard cooked eggs.

INGREDIENT SPOTLIGHT
Spaghetti Squash

Yellow, oblong, and slightly ridged spaghetti squash has flesh that, once cooked, can be forked into the thin strands that give this squash its name. We roast the halved squash and let it cool before scraping out the flesh.

Baked Mustard Chicken

We made 46 variations before we finally got the two best parts of this recipe—the mustard flavor and the crunchy breading—to play nice together. BY CECIL A JENKINS

TALK ABOUT AN appealing supper: chicken, infused with sharp mustard flavor and baked in a crunchy crust. Who wouldn't love that?

Well, me, at least not after pulling what felt like the millionth sheet of chicken parts out of the oven and digging in only to find them completely lacking in mustard flavor, with breading sliding off like sand down a dune.

But I knew there had to be a way. After all, I'd researched thoroughly and found dozens of existing recipes for baked mustard chicken, many of which seemed straightforward and simple: Dunk chicken in mustard, press on some bread crumbs, and bake until done. But while some held promise, none produced the deep mustard flavor and perfectly crunchy crust that I wanted. I realized that to achieve my goal, I'd have to chart new territory.

I patted dry 3 pounds of chicken parts, enough to feed four to six people, and put them through a quick dredge in flour, a dip in beaten egg (fortified with some Dijon mustard), and a roll in panko bread crumbs. I slid them into the oven and waited, hopeful.

Letdown. While the chicken cooked perfectly (in just 35 to 40 minutes), it was desperately short on the whole point of this dish: mustard flavor. And the bread crumbs, though adhering to each other, stubbornly refused to stay stuck to the chicken, instead, they formed a sheath that peeled right off.

My first move to address the wimpy mustard flavor was to ditch the egg yolk in the egg dip, the flavorful yolk was obscuring the dip's mustardiness. I whisked up an egg white–only dip and added even more mustard to it. But when I baked this batch, the coating again slid right off.

After close inspection, I concluded that mustard makes a lousy adhesive. Because it was adding moisture to the coating, the bread crumbs were just steaming off the chicken. So I cut back on the amount of Dijon in the egg white dip. This did help the coating stick but robbed the chicken of precious mustard flavor.

A promising salve lurked in the pantry: dry mustard powder. Adding it to the egg white dip and to the bread crumbs contributed some mustardy heat but not enough. This dish needed yet more mustard, but where to fit it in?

I turned to the bread crumbs themselves. I'd already tossed some mustard powder in with them, but could I doctor them up in a way that would bring even more mustard to the party? I fired up the food processor and pulsed some mustard into the crumbs (not too much; just 5 tablespoons was enough to saturate them), along with melted butter, white wine vinegar, and some fresh tarragon. After I toasted the mix, the bread crumbs took on a lovely mustard flavor.

With mustard in my egg dip and in my crumbs, I went in for the hat trick: a quick, creamy Dijon sauce to seal the deal with a third vibrant, vigorous mustard punch.

BAKED MUSTARD CHICKEN

Serves 4 to 6

Ian's Panko Breadcrumbs, Original Style won a recent test kitchen taste test of bread crumbs. The seasoned bread crumbs brown quickly; stir them frequently for even browning. You will need two rimmed baking sheets for this recipe.

MUSTARD SAUCE

- ¼ cup Dijon mustard
- ¼ cup sour cream
- 1 tablespoon water
- 2 teaspoons white wine vinegar
- 2 teaspoons minced fresh tarragon
- ⅛ teaspoon pepper
- Pinch salt

CHICKEN

- 7 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 7 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 2½ tablespoons white wine vinegar
- 2½ tablespoons dry mustard
- ½ teaspoon granulated garlic
- Salt and pepper
- 2⅓ cups panko bread crumbs
- 1¼ teaspoons minced fresh tarragon
- 3 pounds bone-in chicken pieces (2 split breasts cut in half crosswise, 2 drumsticks, and 2 thighs), skin removed, trimmed
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- 3 large egg whites
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese

1. FOR THE MUSTARD SAUCE: Whisk all ingredients together in bowl, set aside. (Sauce can be refrigerated for up to 2 days.)

2. FOR THE CHICKEN: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Process melted butter, 5 tablespoons Dijon mustard, vinegar, 1½ tablespoons dry mustard, granulated garlic, ½ teaspoon pepper, and ¼ teaspoon salt in food processor until combined, about 5 seconds, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Add panko and tarragon and pulse until mixture resembles wet sand, about 8 pulses.

3. Spread bread crumb mixture in even layer on rimmed baking sheet, breaking up any clumps. Bake, stirring every 5 minutes, until golden brown, 14 to 16 minutes. Let cool slightly and crumble larger clumps with your fingers. Increase oven temperature to 400 degrees.

4 Set wire rack in second rimmed baking sheet and spray with vegetable oil spray. Pat chicken dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Spread flour in shallow dish. Whisk egg whites, paprika, remaining 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard, and remaining 1 tablespoon dry mustard in second shallow dish. Transfer cooled crumbs to third shallow dish and stir in Parmesan.

5. Working with 1 piece at a time, dredge chicken pieces in flour, shaking off excess; dip into egg white mixture to thoroughly coat, letting excess drip back into dish; then coat with crumbs, pressing gently to adhere. Transfer chicken pieces to prepared wire rack. Bake until breasts register 160 degrees and drumsticks/thighs register 175 degrees, 35 to 40 minutes. Let rest for 5 minutes. Serve with mustard sauce.

For big, layered mustard flavor, we use both dry mustard and Dijon in the crumbs and more Dijon in the wet dip and sauce.

Shrimp Creole

To create an authentic Creole dish without using every spice on the rack, we looked to the past for inspiration. BY KATE LEAIRD

SHRIMP CREOLE, ONCE an elegant New Orleans dish of sweet savory shrimp poached in a tomato-based sauce, has evolved over the years into an unbridled spice cabinet raid. Recipes call for a dozen or more different dried herbs and spices to achieve an "authentic" Creole flavor Why? Does this dish have to be a riot of flavor? Isn't there room for subtlety?

A thorough search of our vintage cookbook library gave me hope. While some of the old recipes I found were too bare-bones, and others plain reckless (including a 1959 gem that had me boiling shrimp for 90 minutes), I found some that promised what I wanted: a complex but refined sauce that would highlight the tender, savory shrimp without an epic ingredient list. A middle ground.

Following New Orleans culinary tradition, I started the sauce with a roux, sautéing flour and oil to create a thickening base. I added the "holy trinity" of Louisiana cooking—onions, celery, and green bell peppers, all finely chopped to create a solid base of flavor. After the vegetables had softened and begun to brown, I stirred in a restrained mix of Creole spices, including paprika, garlic powder, and cayenne, among others, and then doused the sizzling veggies with dry white wine. Once the wine was mostly cooked off, I introduced a can of diced tomatoes.

I'd need more liquid to submerge the shrimp, so naturally I tried chicken broth and vegetable broth, but both, to my surprise, seemed to muddy the cooking liquid and mask the sweet, delicate shrimp flavor. I ditched the stock for more white wine, but that took things in a far-too-boozy direction.

Could the answer be as simple as water? Yes: A quarter cup of water, plus a bit of Worcestershire for depth and sugar for sweetness, gave me a lovely poaching liquid and sauce.

Once the peeled and deveined shrimp were cooked (just 5 to 7 minutes in the liquid for perfectly tender shrimp), I added a little lemon juice and parsley for freshness. Once I spooned the shrimp and sauce over rice (which thirstily soaked up the juices), I had a lovely, beautifully balanced, multifaceted and invigorating Louisiana-style supper, at once elegant and simple. You can add hot sauce if you want, but I think this Shrimp Creole is perfect just as it is.

SHRIMP CREOLE Serves 4 to 6

Serve this dish over white rice

CREOLE SEASONING

- 2 teaspoons paprika
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon dried thyme
- ¼ teaspoon dried basil
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper

SHRIMP

- 1 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 onion, chopped fine
- 1 green bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and chopped fine
- 2 celery ribs, chopped fine
- Salt and pepper
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes
- ¼ cup water
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 2 pounds large shrimp (26 to 30 per pound), peeled, deveined, and tails removed
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
- 2 scallions, sliced thin

1. FOR THE CREOLE SEASONING Combine all ingredients in bowl and set aside

2. FOR THE SHRIMP: Heat oil in Dutch oven over medium heat until shimmering. Add flour and cook, stirring constantly, until light brown, 3 to 5 minutes. Add onion, bell pepper, celery, and ½ teaspoon salt and cook, stirring often, until vegetables are softened and beginning to brown, 10 to 12 minutes, scraping up any browned bits.

3. Stir in Creole seasoning and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add wine and cook until nearly evaporated, 4 to 6 minutes, scraping up any browned bits. Add tomatoes and their juice, water, Worcestershire, and sugar. Bring to boil, reduce heat to low, and simmer, covered and stirring occasionally, until slightly thickened, about 30 minutes.

4. Add shrimp, increase heat to medium, and return to simmer. Cook until shrimp are opaque and just cooked through, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in lemon juice and parsley. Season with salt and pepper to taste, sprinkle with scallions, and serve

Diced tomatoes—and plenty of paprika—give our Shrimp Creole its rich red color

KEY STEPS Building Fond and Deglazing

Many cooks think about fond—the concentrated browned bits on the bottom of your cooking vessel—as a meat-based phenomenon (as when making gravy or a pan sauce for seared steaks), but it happens with vegetables, too. But fond is useless if it doesn't dissolve into the sauce. To make sure this happens, gently scrape the bottom of the pot (we like to use a wooden spoon) after adding liquid so the fond's flavor is incorporated into the dish

Cranberry–Sour Cream Pound Cake

Traditional pound cake is all about balance, so what happens when you throw two untraditional ingredients into the mix? BY REBECCAH MARSTERS

I'M SOMEWHAT OF a pound cake purist: no tangerine rind, maple bourbon glaze, or butterscotch in my pound cake, please. To me, the beauty of pound cake is in its simplicity: a velvety, tender, fine crumb and straightforward vanilla flavor. But I recently enjoyed a slice of cranberry–sour cream pound cake at my local coffee shop; it was good enough to get me rethinking my purist bias. While the cake was a little gummy and too sour, the bright combination had great potential. I set out to develop a recipe for cranberry–sour cream pound cake that had the cake's signature tight and sturdy crumb, sported a crisp and golden top crust, and was enriched—but not overwhelmed—with sour cream and tart cranberries.

I combed through baking books in the test kitchen's cookbook library and found recipes for sour cream pound cake calling for anywhere from a few tablespoons to a whole cup of sour cream. Butter, sugar, eggs, and flour (all purpose or cake) amounts varied. While traditional pound cake relies on creaming (beating the butter and sugar together to incorporate air pockets) to help with leavening, many modern recipes call for baking soda or baking powder. I'd try both techniques. I gathered a half dozen promising recipes and headed into the test kitchen.

While some cakes tasted good, most had texture issues. Cake flour promised a more delicate crumb, but it buckled under the moisture from the sour cream. Baking powder helped lighten the texture and produce an impressive rise. And as for the sour cream, I found ⅓ cup to be perfect—lesser amounts didn't register; any more and the cake was too dense and sour.

I also learned that 2 tablespoons of milk mixed into the sour cream made it easier to incorporate evenly into the batter. Two sticks of butter, 1½ cups of sugar, five eggs (up from the three or four most recipes call for—the extra eggs help lift the heavy batter), and 2 teaspoons of vanilla rounded out my ingredient list.

I had a tasty cake, but the texture still wasn't quite perfect—it was a little gummy. I suspected that the wet sour cream was the culprit. After a series of tests, I found that I could back off just a bit on two other moisture adding ingredients—butter and sugar (both of which melt into a liquid state in the oven)—without my tasters being any the wiser, and this eliminated the gumminess. Now that I had the perfect sour cream pound cake base, it was time to add the cranberries.

Starting with the simplest approach, I stirred a cup of whole cranberries into the batter and baked. Of course, nothing's that simple: The berries were too big, leaving unsightly red craters in each slice and creating explosions of mouth puckering tartness. Chopping the cranberries solved the first problem, distributing slivers of berry evenly throughout the cake. To take the sting out of the tart berries, I tossed them with a tablespoon of confectioners' sugar, and now the cake was really good—moist, velvety, and very flavorful.

CRANBERRY–SOUR CREAM POUND CAKE

Serves 8

If you're using frozen cranberries for this recipe, there's no need to thaw them first. The ideal temperature for the eggs and butter is 60 degrees. The test kitchen's preferred loaf pan measures 8½ by 4½ inches; if you use a 9 by 5-inch loaf pan, start checking for doneness 5 minutes earlier than advised in the recipe. This cake bakes for almost 2 hours and must cool for 2 hours more.

- **5 large eggs, room temperature**
- **2 teaspoons vanilla extract**
- **1¾ cups (8¾ ounces) all-purpose flour**
- **Salt**
- **½ teaspoon baking powder**
- **⅓ cup sour cream**
- **2 tablespoons milk**
- **14 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened but still cool**
- **1¼ cups (8¾ ounces) granulated sugar**
- **4 ounces (1 cup) fresh or frozen cranberries, chopped coarse**
- **1 tablespoon confectioners' sugar**

1. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Spray 8½ by 4½ inch loaf pan with baking spray with flour. Whisk eggs and vanilla together in 2-cup liquid measuring cup. Sift flour, ¾ teaspoon salt, and baking powder into bowl. Whisk sour cream and milk together in second bowl.

To make sure the tart cranberries don't overpower the cake, we chop them into smaller pieces and toss them with confectioners' sugar before folding them into the batter.

2. Using stand mixer fitted with paddle, beat butter on medium-high speed until smooth and creamy, 2 to 3 minutes, scraping down bowl once. Reduce speed to medium and gradually pour in granulated sugar. Increase speed to medium-high and beat until pale and fluffy, 3 to 5 minutes, scraping down bowl as needed.

3. Reduce speed to medium and gradually add egg mixture in slow, steady stream. Scrape bottom and sides of bowl and continue to mix on medium speed until uniform, about 1 minute (batter may look slightly curdled).

4. Reduce speed to low and add flour mixture in 3 additions, alternating with sour cream mixture in 2 additions, scraping down bowl as needed. Give batter final stir by hand.

5. Toss cranberries with confectioners' sugar and ⅛ teaspoon salt in bowl until evenly coated, then gently but thoroughly fold into batter. Transfer batter to prepared pan and tap pan on counter twice to release air bubbles. Bake until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 1¾ hours to 1 hour 55 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking.

6. Let cake cool in pan on wire rack for 15 minutes. Remove cake from pan and let cool completely on rack, about 2 hours, before serving. (Cooled cake can be wrapped tightly in plastic wrap and stored at room temperature for up to 3 days.)

Chocolate-Cherry Brownies

Adding cherries to brownies seemed like a brilliant idea—until we sampled batch after batch of soggy brownies. BY MORGAN BOLLING

CHOCOLATE AND CHERRIES are a common pairing—think Black Forest cake or chocolate-covered cherries. The richness of chocolate is a perfect match for the sweet-tart fruitiness of cherries. I wanted to find the best way to add bright cherry flavor to chewy chocolate brownies.

To start, I baked six existing recipes for chocolate-cherry brownies. As my colleagues and I tasted them, it became apparent that incorporating the cherries without ruining the texture of the brownies was going to be my biggest challenge. A few of the recipes called for simply spooning cherry pie filling or cherry preserves on top of brownies: It was easy, sure, but way too sweet. Recipes that used chopped fresh or frozen cherries were too wet, and the pieces of fruit were gummy inside the brownies. Those that used cherry extract tasted medicinal, and cherry liqueur is a bit obscure for a brownie recipe. To add insult to injury, none of the base brownies were very good.

Since I wasn't making any progress with existing recipes, I decided to start somewhere solid—with a favorite test kitchen recipe for chewy brownies. This recipe uses both cocoa powder and chopped unsweetened chocolate for richness and depth. As for the cherries, I hoped I could sprinkle chopped fresh cherries with sugar and leave them to drain off some of their liquid before stirring them into the brownie batter; unfortunately, this didn't work, as the slimy cherry bits still made the brownies too wet. I turned to dried cherries. They added a ton of fruit flavor (both sweetened and unsweetened worked fine here) and didn't make the brownies soggy, but their texture was a bit leathery.

I knew just what to do: I'd soak the dried cherries in hot liquid to soften them. I ran tests rehydrating the dried cherries in red wine, port, and water. The wine and port added distinct flavors that didn't taste right, and the cherries plumped with water were fine but underwhelming. I tried using different sodas and juices, but nothing tasted right. Then a colleague suggested using what seemed like an odd ingredient, almond extract, explaining that almonds share similar flavor compounds with stone fruit—including cherries. For my next batch, I rehydrated my 6 ounces of dried cherries in ¼ cup of water bolstered by a teaspoon of the potent almond extract. These cherries, once stirred into the batter (with their liquid) and baked, gave the brownies a deep, rounded, fruity complexity.

Rehydrated dried cherries give these brownies the best mix of bold cherry flavor and texture.

DARK CHOCOLATE–CHERRY BROWNIES Makes 24 brownies

Do not cut the brownies until they're fully cooled. Either sweetened or unsweetened dried cherries can be used in this recipe. Droste Cocoa is the test kitchen's highest-rated Dutch-processed brand.

- 1½ cups (6 ounces) dried cherries, chopped
- ¼ cup plus ⅓ cup water
- 1 teaspoon almond extract
- 2 ounces unsweetened chocolate, chopped fine
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces
- 6 tablespoons vegetable oil
- ⅓ cup (1 ounce) Dutch-processed cocoa powder
- 2 large eggs plus 2 large yolks
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2¼ cups (15¾ ounces) sugar
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 1¾ cups (8¾ ounces) all-purpose flour

1. Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Make foil sling for 13 by 9 inch baking pan by folding 2 long sheets of aluminum foil; first sheet should be 13 inches wide and second sheet should be 9 inches wide. Lay sheets of foil in pan perpendicular to each other, with extra foil hanging over edges of pan. Push foil into corners and up sides of pan, smoothing foil flush to pan. Spray lightly with vegetable oil spray.

2. Combine cherries, ¼ cup water, and almond extract in small bowl. Microwave, covered, until hot, about 1 minute. Let stand, covered, until cherries are soft, about 5 minutes. Microwave chocolate and butter in separate large bowl at 50 percent power, stirring occasionally, until melted, about 45 seconds. Whisk in oil, cocoa, and remaining ⅓ cup water. (Mixture may look curdled.)

3. Whisk eggs and yolks and vanilla into chocolate mixture until smooth. Whisk in sugar and salt until fully incorporated. Stir in flour until just combined. Stir in softened cherries and their liquid.

4. Pour batter into prepared pan, spread into corners, and smooth top with rubber spatula. Bake until slightly puffed and toothpick inserted in center comes out with few moist, fudgy crumbs attached, 25 to 30 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking.

5. Let brownies cool in pan on wire rack for 1 hour. Using foil overhang, lift brownies out of pan. Return brownies to wire rack and let cool completely, about 1 hour. Cut into squares and serve.

INGREDIENT SPOTLIGHT

Almond Extract

It's no mere coincidence that cherries and almonds taste good together. Almonds are genetically related to all stone fruit, and thus they share some of the same chemical makeup.

FLAVOR FRIENDS
Almonds and cherries taste good together because they share flavor compounds.

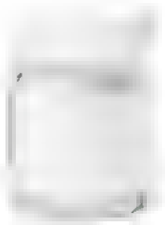
Getting to Know Leaveners

Leaveners add lift and lightness to lots of different foods. But they work in different ways. BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

Baking Soda

ACID REQUIRED

Sodium bicarbonate—baking soda—produces carbon dioxide when activated with moist, acidic ingredients like buttermilk, lemon juice, or sour cream. This gas physically causes batters to rise, and the heat of the oven sets the risen batter. Use too little and you don't get enough lift; use too much and the bubbles will burst, leaving your baked goods flat. Baking soda also makes doughs more alkaline, which encourages browning.



Baker's Ammonia

CLASSIC LIFTER

Ammonium carbonate—also called baker's ammonia or hartshorn—isn't used much in this country anymore, but it's still common in Greek and Scandinavian baking. It adds lift to thin items that benefit from a lighter texture (like crackers) and don't need to grow much in size. It gives off an initial ammonia odor during baking, but the odor dissipates quickly, leaving no off-flavor in the baked goods.

Baking Powder

POWER TRIO

Baking powder is a combination of baking soda, acid salt (such as cream of tartar), and cornstarch. Since baking powder contains acid already, it only needs moisture to activate. We recommend using double-acting baking powder, which reacts immediately when mixed with liquid and then a second time when exposed to heat. Date your baking powder when you open it; its leavening power declines noticeably after 6 months.

Steam

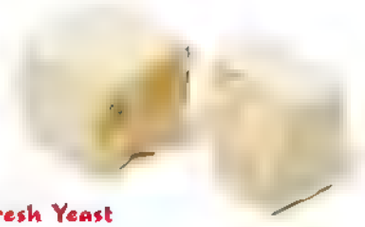
VAPOR-RISE

How does puff pastry rise without leaveners? Steam. In a very hot environment, butter spread between layers of dough melts, and the liquid turns to steam. The dough is elastic enough to rise before becoming a stable crust. Ditto for popovers and cream puffs. Just as the trapped steam makes these items rise, it is apt to set them flat if the heat drops before the dough has a chance to set, so resist opening the oven door prematurely.

Instant Yeast

RAPID RISER

Also known as rapid-rise yeast, instant yeast is dehydrated to the same concentration as active dry, but by a gentler, less-damaging method. As a result, rapid-rise yeast can be mixed directly into other ingredients, and you can use less without a reduction in leavening. We prefer rapid-rise yeast in the test kitchen for its potency, convenience, and clean flavor. This yeast has a long shelf life and can be stored, unopened, for up to two years.



Fresh Yeast

IT'S ALIVE!

Yeast is a living microorganism that leavens by ingesting sugars in the flour and expelling carbon dioxide. This process takes time, whereas chemical leaveners can work immediately. Also called cake or compressed yeast, fresh yeast has a crumbly, soft texture that dissolves easily in warm liquid. Fresh yeast is a powerful leavener, but its short shelf life (about two weeks in the fridge) makes it impractical for most home uses.

Natural Yeast

SOURDOUGH STARTER

A mix of flour and water provides a home for wild, naturally occurring yeasts and bacteria to collect and grow. Over about 10 days, with daily doses of flour and water "refreshments," the yeasts and bacteria ferment, transforming sugars in the flour into carbon dioxide gas and lending complex flavor and tang to the mix. A portion of this starter is then added to bread recipes. True sourdough breads contain no other leaveners.

Active Dry Yeast

DIRECT PROOF

Active dry yeast has been 95 percent dehydrated into tiny granules. This intense process damages some of the cells while others become dormant, so we "proof" the yeast in warm (about 110 degrees) water before adding it to the rest of the ingredients; the yeast will start to bubble when it activates. To substitute rapid-rise yeast in recipes that call for active dry, use 25 percent less than called for. All types of dry yeast stay fresh longer when stored in the refrigerator or freezer.

Cream of Tartar

MERINGUE MAKER

While not a leavener per se, cream of tartar (or potassium acid tartrate) is the acidic component in baking powder that allows it to activate without an additional acid. Cream of tartar is a helpful pantry ingredient in its own right; its acidic nature lowers the pH of egg whites, which creates more volume, greater stability (they're less likely to weep), and a glossier appearance when they're whipped for soufflés and meringues.

Beer

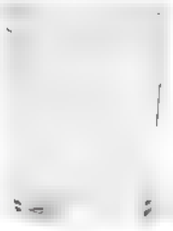
BATTER UP

Beer's carbonation makes it a good choice for leavening batters for fried onion rings and tempura-style vegetables. The carbon dioxide bubbles add lift to the batter as they escape and evaporate in the hot oil environment. Beer's acidity also keeps these batters tender, since the low pH inhibits gluten formation. We use beer in the light batter for our California Fish Tacos (**CooksCountry.com/fishtacos**).

Egg Whites

AIR TRAP

As you whip egg whites, their proteins loosen and stretch, trapping air inside a fluffy foam. While air is the actual leavener that gives angel food cakes, sponge cakes, and some pound cakes their lift, egg whites or whole eggs are usually necessary to provide the foaming ingredient that captures the air and traps it in the batter. See for yourself in our Rolled Soufflé for a Crowd (**CooksCountry.com/rolledsouffle**).



Seltzer

TINY BUBBLES

Like beer, seltzer is full of bubbles that can add lift to foods. We've used seltzer in place of whipped egg whites in waffle recipes and also love the way it lightens our Maryland Crab Fluff (**CooksCountry.com/crabfluff**). It's important to use fresh, highly carbonated unflavored seltzer or club soda in recipes. Sparkling waters like Perrier don't have the same amount of carbonation and will cause your recipe to fall flat.

Illustration: Jay Layman

Steak Modiga

This St. Louis specialty features a juicy steak topped with crunchy bread crumbs and a buttery, cheese-enriched sauce. BY ASHLEY MOORE

Visit the Italian neighborhood known as "The Hill" in St. Louis, Missouri, and you'll find steak modiga on many restaurant menus. What is it? A steak (usually strip or filet mignon) that's piled with seasoned bread crumbs and grilled or broiled until juicy inside and crunchy on top. It's served with a buttery, white wine–and mushroom sauce enriched with a local specialty: salty, smoky Provel cheese

I searched regional cookbooks and found a handful of recipes for this unusual steak treatment, all of which were grilled outdoors, and decided to give them a try. The results were disappointing. In almost every version, most of the breading either stuck to the grate or fell off and burned in the fire, and the sauces were too thin and oily. I wanted breading that stuck to the steak, not to mention a silky sauce. And I wanted to make it inside, not outdoors

I tried employing the broiler (using a simple but flavorful topping of crunchy panko bread crumbs, garlic, parsley, and salt and pepper), but the crumbs burned by the time the steak was cooked. I tried baking the steaks in a hot oven, flipping them halfway through cooking for even browning, but the crumbs didn't adhere well and the steaks didn't have any char

The next option was to move to the stovetop and use a grill pan. The grill pan gave me pretty much the same results as the grill—crumbs that fell off the steak and burned

A colleague suggested browning the steaks crumb side down in a nonstick skillet. Following her advice, I brushed the steaks with olive oil and then pressed the seasoned crumbs onto one side. I then seared the steaks on both sides, starting with the breaded side, in a nonstick skillet

Since the searing didn't fully cook the steaks, I transferred them (breaded side up) to a wire rack set in a rimmed baking sheet and finished them in a 400 degree oven, which took about 5 minutes. After a few tests, I learned that letting the raw, breaded steaks rest for just 5 minutes before searing gave the crumb coating a chance to set up and stick better

Now for the sauce. I knew I wanted a flavorful, cheesy sauce with a luxurious, creamy texture that wasn't too heavy—the sauce is there to complement the steak, not overshadow it. Tradition dictates a sauce made with mushrooms, white wine, garlic, cream, chicken broth, and cheese.

I started by browning mushrooms and then adding white wine and reducing it. I incorporated minced garlic and a bit of flour for thickening, followed by chicken broth and heavy cream. I cooked it down for a few minutes and was ready to stir in some cheese. But what kind? Provel is not widely available outside of St. Louis, so I tested American, cheddar, Swiss, and provolone, with the latter winning out for its mild tang and smooth melting

After arranging the steaks on a serving platter, I spooned the sauce over the top and finished it all with a sprinkle of verdant fresh parsley. Cheesy sauce, tender steak, and crisp crumbs—my modiga was a winner.

ITALIAN STEAK MODIGA

Serves 4

Note that only one side of the steak is coated with bread crumbs, the other sides remain bare

- **4 (10- to 12-ounce) boneless strip steaks, about 1 inch thick, trimmed**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **1 tablespoon unsalted butter**
- **8 ounces white mushrooms, trimmed and sliced thin**
- **¼ cup dry white wine**
- **1 tablespoon all-purpose flour**
- **4 garlic cloves, minced**
- **1 cup chicken broth**
- **¼ cup heavy cream**
- **¼ cup plus 1 teaspoon olive oil**
- **1 cup panko bread crumbs**
- **¼ cup chopped fresh parsley**
- **2 slices deli provolone cheese (2 ounces), torn into 1-inch pieces**

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Set wire rack in rimmed baking sheet. Pat steaks dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper; set aside

2. Melt butter in large saucepan over medium high heat. Add mushrooms, ½ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper and cook until liquid has evaporated and mushrooms begin to brown, 5 to 7 minutes Add wine and cook until evaporated, about 3 minutes.

3. Stir in flour and half of garlic and cook until mushrooms are well coated and garlic is fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir in broth and cream, scraping up any browned bits. Bring to boil and cook until slightly thickened, about 3 minutes. Remove from heat, cover, and keep warm.

4. Pour ¼ cup oil into shallow dish. Process panko in food processor until finely ground, about 10 seconds. Combine 3 tablespoons parsley, ground panko, remaining garlic, ¾ teaspoon salt, and ¾ teaspoon pepper in second shallow dish

5. Working with 1 steak at a time, add to oil and turn to coat on all sides Transfer oiled steak to panko mixture and press firmly to coat only 1 side of steak with mixture. Transfer steak, breaded side up, to prepared wire rack and let sit for 5 minutes.

6. Heat remaining 1 teaspoon oil in 12 inch nonstick skillet over medium high heat until shimmering. Place steaks in skillet, breaded side down, and cook until well browned, about 3 minutes Flip steaks and continue to cook until well browned on second side, about 3 minutes Return steaks to wire rack, breaded side up.

7. Roast until meat registers 120 to 125 degrees (for medium-rare), 4 to 7 minutes. Let steaks cool on wire rack for 5 minutes while finishing sauce.

8. Return sauce to simmer over medium heat. Whisk in provolone until melted, about 1 minute. Serve steaks with sauce, sprinkled with remaining 1 tablespoon parsley.

Why should cutlets have a lock on crunch? Crisp bread crumbs are great on thick steaks, too.

Two-Hour Turkey

With two small cuts, we cooked a juicy roast turkey for the holidays in just 2 hours.

BY MORGAN BOLLING

HERE IN THE test kitchen, we've cooked turkey in dozens of ways. We've brined, glazed, smoked, spatchcocked, and even fired up the deep fryer. And we've cooked some marvelous turkeys. But this year, we wanted a recipe that many home cooks, particularly those who cook turkey just once a year, might find helpful during the busy holiday season. Besides juicy, flavorful meat and crisp skin, we also wanted ease, with a side of speed.

In a perfect world, all you'd do is tie on an apron, slide a whole turkey into the oven, and a couple of hours (and a glass of sherry) later, pull out a beautiful, golden brown, Norman Rockwell–esque centerpiece. And since it'd be done so quickly, you'd set it aside to rest—a necessary step for juicy meat—and fill the now empty oven with dressing, green bean casserole, dinner rolls, and the rest of the requisite side dishes. Wishful thinking? Perhaps. But I was determined.

I bought a 14-pound turkey, big enough for a 10-person feast. To save time and effort, I chose a prebrined bird, meaning that it was already injected with a saltwater solution to help season the meat and keep it moist. I nestled the bird into a roasting rack, and since I wanted it to cook quickly, I started it in a high 450-degree oven.

The breast reached 160 degrees—our test kitchen target for juicy white meat—in just 1 hour and 35 minutes. However, large roasts continue to cook after they come out of the oven, a phenomenon known as carryover cooking, and in this case, the breast meat climbed to 180 degrees: cardboard.

I kept closer tabs on the temperature during my next test, checking it every few minutes. Once the breast meat hit 120 degrees I turned my oven down to a low 250 degrees, hoping that the reduction would finish cooking my bird more gently and stave off overcooking during the resting phase. It worked, mostly: I had juicy breast meat under lovely, crackly skin. And the bird was still in and out of the oven in less than 2 hours.

But the crux of all turkey woes loomed. White meat cooks faster than dark meat, and my dark meat wasn't done. Dark meat (legs and thighs) needs to reach at least 175 degrees to be fully cooked—long after the point at which the white meat goes dry.

Our two-hour turkey cooks fast but looks a bit akimbo when cooked. We suggest carving it in the kitchen and bringing the platter to the table.

We have a few techniques in the test kitchen to help keep the breast from overcooking, including icing down the breast before it cooks or flipping the turkey over partway through cooking—but while these tricks helped, they were more work than I was willing to do. I tried covering the breast with aluminum foil, but the difference was minimal.

I flipped my thinking. Rather than protecting the breast meat, I wondered, could I expose the dark meat to more heat more quickly? For my next test, I cut into the skin on both sides of the bird, just between the breast and the thigh, to open up that area. This caused the legs to spread away from the breast, giving them more surface area and exposing them to more oven heat faster. Success. The thighs reached 175 degrees at approximately the same time as the breast hit 160. I set the turkey aside to rest (uncovered, to keep the skin crisp).

What's turkey without gravy? A prom queen without a date, that's what. So I tossed some vegetables and the turkey neck under the turkey while it roasted, letting them take on deep, caramelized flavors. After the bird came out, I used these roasting pan goodies, along with white wine, sage, thyme, and water, to make a simple, flavorful gravy.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE

Turkey Yoga

A little up-front prep helps ensure that the dark meat (thighs and legs) cooks at the same rate as the white meat (breasts). Use a sharp knife to slice through just the skin (not the meat) between the breast and leg on each side. This cut loosens the leg so it splays out slightly, exposing more dark meat to direct heat, accelerating its cooking.

The browned, slightly splayed finished bird

TWO-HOUR TURKEY AND GRAVY

Serves 10 to 12

If you can't find a self-basting turkey (Butterball makes our favorite self-basting bird), a kosher turkey can be substituted. Avoid opening the oven too frequently to take the turkey's temperature. If your turkey is on the smaller side of the weight range, follow the lower end of the time ranges given, and vice versa.

- **2 onions, quartered through root end**
- **2 carrots, peeled and cut into 3-inch pieces**
- **1 celery rib, cut into 3-inch pieces**
- **1 (12- to 14-pound) prebrined turkey, neck reserved, giblets discarded**
- **3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- **Kosher salt and pepper**
- **3 cups water, plus extra as needed**
- **1 tablespoon unsalted butter**
- **¼ cup dry white wine**
- **¼ cup all-purpose flour**
- **4 sprigs fresh thyme**
- **1 sprig fresh sage**

1. Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Scatter onions, carrots, celery, and turkey neck in bottom of large roasting pan. Set V rack over vegetables in roasting pan. Pat turkey dry with paper towels and tuck wingtips behind back. Transfer turkey, breast side up, to V rack.

2. Using sharp knife, slice through skin between breast and leg on each side of turkey to expose entire under side of thigh without cutting into meat. Combine oil, 1 tablespoon salt, and 1½ teaspoons pepper in small bowl. Brush turkey all over with oil mixture.

3. Roast turkey until thickest part of breast registers 120 degrees and thickest part of thighs registers at least 135 degrees, 60 to 70 minutes.

4. Reduce oven temperature to 250 degrees and continue to roast turkey until breast registers 160 degrees and thighs register 175 degrees, 35 to 45 minutes longer. Transfer turkey to carving board and let rest for 45 minutes.

5. While turkey rests, transfer vegetables and turkey neck from roasting pan to bowl, leaving turkey juices behind. Add water to roasting pan with turkey juices and scrape up any browned bits from pan bottom. Transfer deglazed juices to 4-cup liquid measuring cup; add extra water, if needed, to equal 4 cups.

6. Melt butter in Dutch oven over medium high heat. Add vegetables and turkey neck and cook until any liquid has evaporated and browned bits begin to form on bottom of pot, 3 to 5 minutes. Add wine and cook until nearly evaporated, about 2 minutes, scraping up any browned bits.

7. Sprinkle flour over top and cook, stirring constantly, for 1 minute. Add thyme sprigs, sage sprig, deglazed pan juices, ½ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper. Bring to boil, then reduce heat to medium low and simmer until thickened to gravy consistency, 12 to 15 minutes.

8. Strain gravy through fine mesh strainer set over medium saucepan, discard solids. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Carve turkey and serve with gravy.

Gravy Master

There are many ways to thicken gravy. You can start with a roux, you can add a cornstarch slurry to the drippings; you can add a paste of flour and butter to the roasting pan. Our method makes full use of the vegetables and turkey neck that roast under the bird. We brown them in butter, deglaze with wine and sprinkle with flour. Then we add seasonings and the pan juices and simmer for a thick, full-flavored accompaniment to our easy turkey.

WHAT'S THE BEST ROASTING RACK?

A good roasting rack securely holds a roast, elevating it so it doesn't sit in fat while cooking. It should allow hot air to circulate around the meat—key for accurate cooking and a perfectly rendered exterior. We've often disliked the racks that come bundled with roasting pans; even our winning pan's rack is slightly unstable. What's more, many roasting pans don't come with a rack in the first place, and racks occasionally go astray. For years, we've turned to a nearly $25 rack from All-Clad.

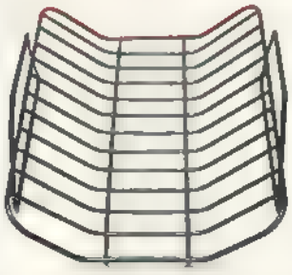
But a slew of new models have entered the market, with snazzy silicone shapes and intriguing designs. To compare, we tested our favorite All-Clad against six newcomers, priced from roughly $8.50 to nearly $26, by roasting 250 pounds of chicken, beef, and turkey. We looked for stability, capacity, cleanup, design, and—most important—excellent roasted meat.

Some racks were too small. Plump turkeys bulged over their sides as if they were trying to squeeze into their high school jeans, and the racks skittered around the pan. In general, bigger was better, providing both capacity and stability.

Side support was key, too. Those with U- or V-shaped baskets cradled the roasts securely; on flat racks, the birds were unstable. Handles factored heavily too. Loaded racks are heavy, and large handles made them easier to maneuver.

The silicone models looked great but didn't have handles. What's more, they didn't raise the meat enough, so the food steamed on the bottom. In fact, half the models we tested didn't allow for proper air circulation, an issue which was further illustrated when we tried to roast vegetables below a chicken, as we sometimes do when we want an easy one-pan meal. Models without enough clearance turned out pasty potatoes that literally paled in comparison to the crisp, caramel-hued tubers produced by racks with open, raised bottoms. Loads of space wasn't necessary—our winning model had just ½ inch of clearance, but its open slats ensured that hot air had full, even access to the meat. Visit **CooksCountry.com/nov15** for the full story and chart. –HANNAH CROWLEY

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED



ALL-CLAD
Nonstick Large Rack
Price: $24.95
Model: 3016
Dimensions: 14.5 in by 11.2 in by 5 in

CRITERIA	
Cooking	★★★
Capacity	★★★
Stability	★★★
Handles	★★★
Cleanup	★★★
Versatility	★★★

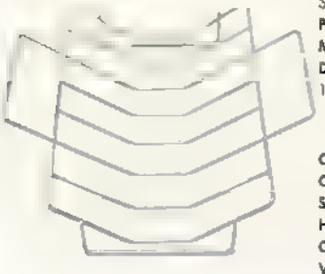
TESTERS' NOTES: This broad rack had very little wiggle room between it and the roasting pan, so it always felt supremely secure, even when holding a 22-pound turkey. It handled everything we set inside it and had handles that were easy and secure to grab. It allowed for proper 360-degree air circulation, so its food was always perfectly browned and evenly rendered.

RECOMMENDED

CUISIPRO
Dual Roaster
Price: $25.13
Model: 74.6791
Dimensions: 13.8 in by 10.2 in by 4.6 in

CRITERIA	
Cooking	★★★
Capacity	★★★
Stability	★★½
Handles	★★
Cleanup	★★★
Versatility	★★½

TESTERS' NOTES: This rack fit chicken, turkey, and roast beef nicely. Its adjustable center slats swing up to hold two upright chickens for side-by-side roasting. It was fairly stable, but its handles are located right where most roasting pans position their handles, so they were hard to grab at times. But it raised its contents up off the pan for circulation and turned out nicely rendered meat.



CALPHALON
Small Roast Rack
Price: $18.95
Model: RR912
Dimensions: 12 in by 12.2 in by 4.25 in

CRITERIA	
Cooking	★★★
Capacity	★★½
Stability	★★
Handles	★★
Cleanup	★★★
Versatility	★★★

TESTERS' NOTES: This rack worked well for chicken and beef, but a 12-pound turkey blocked its handles, rendering them useless. Its smaller frame slid around in the pan, we had to take extra care. (Even though it's called the "small rack," Calphalon doesn't currently sell a larger model.) Otherwise, it cleaned up readily and allowed for proper air circulation for optimal browning.

Illustration: Jay Layman

Sourdough Dressing

Sourdough bread's characteristic tang and chewy texture liven up any sandwich. Our goal was to add the same punch to our holiday dressing. BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

Ordinary white sandwich bread gets its yearly brush with greatness in holiday dressing, coming to life when toasted and tossed with a savory mix of melted butter, onion, celery, and herbs. But what if we ditched the white bread in favor of complex, tangy sourdough?

I wasn't surprised to find several recipes for sourdough dressing in cookbooks from sourdough's home turf, California. What was unexpected, though, was their use of extra-flavorful vegetables like turnips and kale, presumably to stand up to the sourdough. I was inspired.

The usual process for dressing is to first dry out cubed bread in the oven so the cubes can soak up the liquid. Next, you sauté onion and garlic with herbs and butter on the stovetop. Finally, you combine it all with a binder—broth, eggs, or a creamy custard—before baking in a casserole dish.

But since I was already tossing convention to the wind by exiling the white bread, why should I be tied to the usual process? I decided to roast my vegetables (including the onion and garlic) on a rimmed baking sheet rather than sauté them on the stovetop, since I could do this at the same time as I dried out the bread. I auditioned a long list of vegetables. Though we liked the way sweet root vegetables like carrots and parsnips balanced the sour bread, they took too long to cook. Mushrooms (we preferred meaty shiitakes to cremini) and chopped curly kale, however, were a good fit in both flavor and texture—and they cooked perfectly in my allotted time.

The result was promising, but a bit wimpy. To give the dish some muscle, I topped the tray of vegetables with small pieces of Italian sausage. As the sausage cooked, its fat rendered into the vegetables. A few plumped golden raisins added after roasting contributed sweet notes, sage and chopped onion gave a nod to Thanksgiving tradition.

After tossing the roasted vegetables and dried bread with chicken broth and three eggs, I scooped the dressing into a buttered casserole dish. I covered it with foil and baked it on the lower middle rack for 15 minutes to brown the bottom and then removed the foil for the final 15 minutes needed to crisp the top. Dotting the top with butter ensured some nice brown bits.

SOURDOUGH DRESSING WITH KALE AND MUSHROOMS

Serves 8 to 10

For a meatless variation, omit the sausage and use vegetarian broth. You will need two rimmed baking sheets for this recipe.

- 3½ tablespoons unsalted butter
- ½ cup golden raisins
- ½ cup water
- 1½ pounds sourdough bread, cut into 1-inch pieces
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- 12 ounces shiitake mushrooms, stemmed and sliced ¼ inch thick
- 8 ounces kale, stemmed and chopped coarse
- 1 onion, chopped
- 5 garlic cloves, smashed and peeled
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh sage
- 8 ounces sweet Italian sausage, casings removed
- 2½ cups chicken broth
- 3 large eggs, lightly beaten

1. Adjust oven racks to upper-middle and lower-middle positions and heat oven to 400 degrees. Grease 13 by 9 inch baking dish with 1 tablespoon butter. Grease one 15 by 11 inch sheet of aluminum foil with ½ tablespoon butter. Combine raisins and water in bowl and microwave for 30 seconds. Set aside and let raisins soften for at least 15 minutes, drain.

2. Meanwhile, toss bread, ¼ cup oil, and ½ teaspoon salt together in large bowl; spread evenly on rimmed baking sheet. Combine mushrooms, kale, onion, garlic, sage, remaining ¼ cup oil, ½ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in now-empty bowl; spread on second rimmed baking sheet. Break sausage into ½ inch pieces and distribute evenly over vegetables.

3. Bake bread mixture on upper rack and vegetable mixture on lower rack until bread is golden brown but still tender inside and vegetables and sausage are golden, about 30 minutes, stirring halfway through baking. Transfer sheets to wire racks and let cool slightly, about 10 minutes. Combine toasted bread and vegetable mixture in large bowl.

4. Stir broth, eggs, and drained raisins into bread-vegetable mixture until liquid is absorbed. Transfer dressing to prepared dish. Cut remaining 2 tablespoons butter into ¼ inch pieces and sprinkle evenly over dressing. Cover tightly with prepared foil.

5. Bake dressing on lower rack for 15 minutes. Uncover and continue to bake until top is golden and crisp, about 15 minutes longer. Let cool for 10 minutes before serving.

TO MAKE AHEAD

Dressing can be made through step 4 and refrigerated for up to 24 hours. Increase covered baking time by 5 minutes.

The bold flavors of sourdough, kale, sausage, and shiitake mushrooms are balanced by sweet golden raisins in this hearty dressing.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE Skip the Stovetop

Making dressing usually requires sautéing vegetables on the stovetop before stirring in toasted bread cubes. We avoid the stovetop by simultaneously toasting the bread and roasting the vegetables in the oven before combining them in a baking dish to finish.

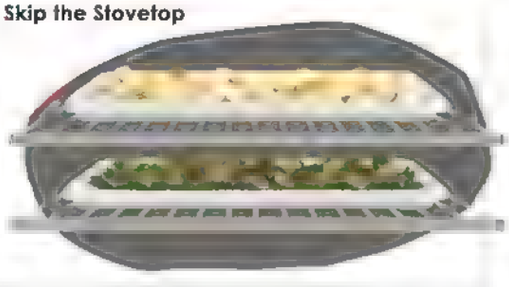


Illustration Lauren Pettapiece

Candied Sweet Potatoes

No more marshmallow topping.
We were looking for balanced sweetness without the toothache. BY CECELIA JENKINS

CANDIED SWEET POTATOES are a classic holiday side dish, but too often they border on dessert territory, clobbering you with sweetness (hello, marshmallows) and totally shortchanging the sweet potato's deep, earthy flavor. I set out to reclaim the pure flavors in this dish with a simple, balanced take in which the "candy" would provide a sweetly delicate counterpoint to the stalwart sweet potatoes.

I started with a handful of recipes found in our cookbook library, many of which called for baking or boiling whole sweet potatoes before slicing and glazing them—and then baking them again. And for all the work involved, too many of these recipes yielded mushy sweet potatoes cloaked in sticky, tooth-rattling syrups. Where was the subtle flavor of the potatoes themselves?

But these initial tests did make a number of things clear. For one thing, I learned that cutting the sweet potatoes too thin inevitably resulted in mush, but cutting them carefully into ¾-inch-thick rounds produced a soft texture that still held together. I also learned that roasting the cut pieces in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet and then flipping them before glazing them and finishing them off gave me attractively browned edges and provided plenty of space to prepare enough for a crowd. Finally, I found that slathering the partially cooked sweet potato pieces with syrup for the last stretch of oven time gave me a richer flavor with a glaze that adhered.

I tried out a long list of glaze flavors to see what would best complement the sweet potatoes without covering them up. I wanted sweetness, but it had to stay in balance. Tangy apple cider was too overpowering, whereas orange juice was distracting, too specifically citrusy. Brown sugar and warm holiday spices were too reminiscent of sweet potato pie and, of course, marshmallows were out.

Maple syrup and butter were the most promising, providing a woodsy sweetness and always welcome butteriness, but the combo can be overly rich; I needed something to temper and restrain them. The fix? Water, the most neutral ingredient in the world. Cutting the maple syrup with an equal amount of water lightened the load without hijacking the flavor, and stirring in cornstarch helped absorb any unwanted wetness. While the spuds were roasting, I simply combined the glaze ingredients in a saucepan and boiled them for just a few minutes to thicken up.

One last detail to smooth out: a neat appearance. Transferring the fully cooked, glazed sweet potatoes from the rimmed baking sheet to a serving dish made for a messy presentation—potatoes fell apart as I was transferring them to the dish, leaving me with what resembled a mash. No: Though this is a dish of rustic flavors, I wanted to give it a neat appearance at the table.

Since I was going into the oven to flip the sweet potatoes as soon as they'd achieved good browning on one side, why not flip them at that point into a table-friendly but also oven-safe baking dish? Now I could arrange the medallions, still only partially cooked, just so. I added the glaze and returned the sweet potatoes to the oven to finish. Glossy, glazy, earthy, rich, and just sweet enough—this was a holiday side dish to be proud of.

Rich, woodsy maple syrup gives our glaze more depth than most.

CANDIED SWEET POTATOES

Serves 6 to 8

Whisk the syrup frequently to keep it from boiling over. A broiler-safe dish (not Pyrex) is important because of the high heat.

- 3 pounds sweet potatoes, peeled, ends trimmed, and sliced ¾ inch thick
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- Salt and pepper
- ½ cup maple syrup
- ½ cup water
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch

1. Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Toss potatoes, oil, and 1 teaspoon salt together in bowl. Evenly space potatoes in single layer on rimmed baking sheet. Bake until potatoes are tender and dark brown on bottom, 18 to 22 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through baking.

2. Meanwhile, combine maple syrup, water, butter, cornstarch, and ⅛ teaspoon salt in small saucepan. Bring to boil over medium-high heat and cook, whisking frequently, until thickened and reduced to 1 cup, 3 to 5 minutes.

3. Place potatoes in broiler-safe 13 by 9 inch baking dish, browned side up, shingling as necessary if you have larger potatoes. Pour syrup mixture over potatoes and bake until bubbling around sides of dish, 8 to 10 minutes. Transfer dish to wire rack and let cool for 10 minutes. Season with pepper to taste. Serve.

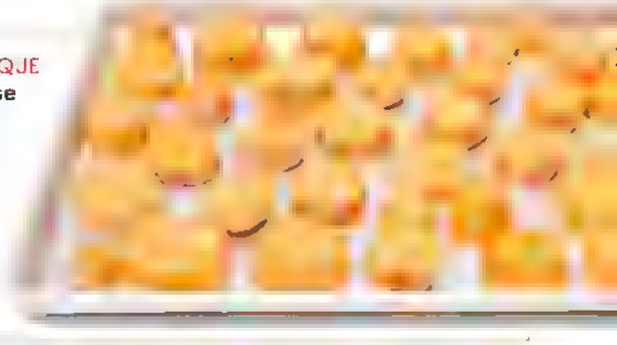
TO MAKE AHEAD

Potatoes and syrup can be prepared through step 2, placed in baking dish, and kept at room temperature for up to 2 hours. In step 3, extend the baking time to 11 to 13 minutes.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE

Brown and Then Braise

Start the rounds of sweet potato on a rimmed baking sheet. Once the bottoms are brown, transfer the potatoes to a baking dish with the glaze to finish.



Brussels Sprout Gratin

Brussels sprouts can send some folks running for the exit. We wanted our take to win over even the harshest skeptics. BY MORGAN BOLLING

Ask a Brussels sprouts–hater why sprouts are so bad and you'll hear some colorful language: "Slimy, stinky, and sulfurous," they'll say, and that's just the complaints beginning with *s*. But there's nothing inherently wrong with Brussels sprouts themselves, it's just the way they've been cooked over the years. I wanted to develop a recipe that would convert even the most ardent anti sprouter—not by covering up their flavor but by casting them in a new light. My plan: a gratin.

After cooking a half dozen Brussels sprout gratins from existing recipes, I knew I had my work cut out for me. None was great, but each had something going for it: One had sprouts that held their shape, one had a nicely balanced cream sauce, and one had a successfully crunchy topping. Could I cobble together the best aspects of each gratin into a single, easy, Thanksgiving worthy dish?

One thing I learned from this initial round of testing: Since Brussels sprouts come in a variety of sizes, precooking them would allow me to customize the cooking time depending on their heft. I tried boiling and microwaving the sprouts, but doing so left them tasting too cabbagey. Roasting at 450 degrees (for 30 to 35 minutes, depending on their sizes) proved a much better option, the dry heat of the oven brings out the very best nutty, roasty flavors that Brussels sprouts have to offer. What's more, roasting them in the same dish that I'd finish the gratin in saved on cleanup.

I'd need something to bring my gratin together, so while the sprouts precooked, I made a Mornay sauce—a creamy cheese sauce (in this case, melty Gruyère and salty Parmesan) thickened by flour and butter. I tossed my sauce with the sprouts in the baking dish and cooked them together until everything bubbled. After tasting these and finding them somewhat dull, I decided to boost the flavors in the sauce with nutmeg, cayenne, a minced garlic clove, and some sweet sharp minced shallot.

To me, the best part of a gratin is the crusty top. I began by topping mine with panko bread crumbs and broiling it for the final minutes of cooking. But in the time it took for the panko to become a nice golden brown, the Brussels sprouts on top of the gratin were getting too dark—some were borderline burnt. I nixed the broiler and simply added the crumbs for just the final few minutes of roasting—but this left my crusty topping pale. Jump-starting the panko by sautéing it in a tablespoon of butter before sprinkling it over the top was the fix. A bit of Gruyère helped tie the crumbs to the rest of the dish.

Nutty, roasted sprouts, a bubbling, creamy cheese sauce; and a crusty topping—sure to win over even the most committed members of the anti-Brussels sprouts brigade.

BRUSSELS SPROUT GRATIN

Serves 6 to 8

Look for smaller Brussels sprouts, no bigger than a golf ball, as they're likely to be sweeter and more tender than large sprouts. If you can find only large sprouts, quarter them. A broiler-safe dish is important because the sprouts cook at such a high temperature.

- 2½ pounds Brussels sprouts, trimmed and halved through stem
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- Salt and pepper
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ¼ cup panko bread crumbs
- 1 shallot, minced
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 1¼ cups heavy cream
- ¾ cup chicken broth
- 2 ounces Gruyère cheese, shredded (½ cup)
- 1 ounce Parmesan cheese, grated (½ cup)
- Pinch ground nutmeg
- Pinch cayenne pepper

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Grease 13 by 9 inch broiler-safe baking dish. Toss Brussels sprouts, oil, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in prepared baking dish. Bake until sprouts are well browned and tender, 30 to 35 minutes. Transfer to wire rack and set aside to cool for at least 5 minutes or up to 30 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, melt 1 tablespoon butter in medium saucepan over medium heat. Add panko and cook, stirring frequently, until golden brown, about 3 minutes. Transfer to bowl and stir in ¼ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper; set aside. Wipe saucepan clean with paper towels.

We don't add the cream sauce and crumbs until after we've roasted the halved sprouts to draw out their sweet, nutty flavors.

3. Melt remaining 2 tablespoons butter in now-empty saucepan over medium heat. Add shallot and garlic and cook until just softened, about 1 minute. Stir in flour and cook for 1 minute. Whisk in cream and broth and bring to boil over medium-high heat. Once boiling, remove from heat and whisk in ¼ cup Gruyère, Parmesan, nutmeg, cayenne, ¼ teaspoon pepper, and ⅛ teaspoon salt until smooth.

4. Pour cream mixture over Brussels sprouts in baking dish and stir to combine. Sprinkle evenly with panko mixture and remaining ¼ cup Gruyère. Bake until bubbling around edges and golden brown on top, 5 to 7 minutes. Transfer dish to wire rack and let cool for 10 minutes. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN TIP

Choose the Right Size Sprouts

For this recipe, the Brussels sprouts should be relatively small, no larger than a golf ball. Larger sprouts can be tougher and more bitter.

Cornmeal Drop Biscuits

Cornmeal should add flavor and a pleasant corny crunch to biscuits. Could we find the right formula for tasty, tender success? BY ASHLEY MOORE

IN MY HOUSE, biscuits are usually for the weekends—when I have time to carefully mix, knead, roll, and stamp them out. But drop biscuits, which are as easy as stirring together the ingredients and portioning them on the baking sheet, come together so quickly that they are a staple on weeknights and perfect for holidays when there's so much more to concentrate on. But as easy as they are to make, they still deliver homemade flavor, something unattainable in every store-bought biscuit I've ever tried.

Our dependable buttermilk drop biscuit recipe produces tender, tasty biscuits and uses the cool trick of stirring together cold buttermilk and melted (and cooled) butter until the butter clumps. These clumps of butter create steam during baking, and that steam helps make the biscuits light and airy. I wanted something similar but different, something that kept the butter clumps but also incorporated the rustic, earthy flavor and lightly crunchy texture of cornmeal.

I started by simply introducing cornmeal into the mixture, swapping out half of the flour and substituting cornmeal in its place. But the result was a dry, unpleasantly dense biscuit. I needed something more tender and light. After a few more swings with varying quantities of cornmeal, I landed at a 1:3 ratio of ½ cup cornmeal to 1½ cups flour, which gave me a biscuit texture I was happy with.

The cornmeal presence was strong in these biscuits, but the flavor wasn't quite in balance. When working with cornmeal in the past, in cornbreads and muffins and so forth, we've often turned to sweeteners to draw out the corn flavor. My recipe had a small amount of sugar, but I wondered whether more sugar would help—or, for that matter, if another sweetener would be preferable to plain white sugar.

I tried substituting maple syrup, honey, and brown sugar (both light and dark) for the granulated sugar, but each of these options contributed a strong, distinctive flavor that blurred rather than enhanced the corn flavor. I decided to stick with plain white sugar.

I increased the amount of sugar in the recipe. My initial tests were too sweet (I wanted a dinner-table biscuit, after all, not a dessert), but after another few rounds of test biscuits, I found that 3 tablespoons of granulated sugar gave me a balanced biscuit: savory and slightly sweet with pronounced cornmeal flavor.

My simple, pantry-friendly recipe stands on its own but has the added benefit of being a solid canvas for experimentation, welcoming to flavorful stir-ins to suit a range of tastes. Plenty of freshly cracked black pepper introduced a bit of refreshing pungency to one version, chopped green chiles added a bit of southwestern flair to another version, and finally, chopped fresh sage recalled the festive flavors of Thanksgiving, an excellent complement to turkey and gravy.

CORNMEAL DROP BISCUITS

Makes 12 biscuits

Be sure to chill the buttermilk so the melted-and-cooled butter clumps when the two are combined. These biscuits are best eaten still warm from the oven; try them spread with honey butter or pimento cheese.

- 1½ cups (7½ ounces) all-purpose flour
- ½ cup (2½ ounces) stone-ground cornmeal
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup buttermilk, chilled
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Whisk flour, cornmeal, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt together in large bowl. Stir buttermilk and melted butter together in separate bowl until butter forms clumps.

2. Add buttermilk mixture to flour mixture and stir with rubber spatula until just incorporated. Using greased ¼-cup dry measuring cup or equal-size portion scoop, drop scant ¼-cup scoops of batter 1½ inches apart on prepared sheet (use spoon to free batter from cup if necessary).

3. Bake until biscuit tops are golden brown, 12 to 14 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through baking. Transfer biscuits to wire rack and let cool for 5 minutes before serving. (To refresh day-old biscuits, heat them in 300-degree oven for 10 minutes.)

This version of our Cornmeal Drop Biscuits gets a kick from diced green chiles.

CORNMEAL DROP BISCUITS WITH BLACK PEPPER

Add 1½ teaspoons coarsely ground pepper to flour mixture in step 1.

CORNMEAL DROP BISCUITS WITH GREEN CHILES

Add ¼ cup canned diced green chiles, patted dry, to flour mixture in step 1.

CORNMEAL DROP BISCUITS WITH SAGE

Add 1 tablespoon minced fresh sage to flour mixture in step 1.

KEY STEP **Clumping Butter**

Stirring melted butter into buttermilk creates little butter clumps. They look funny, but these small "butter balls" melt and release steam in the oven to create light, fluffy biscuits.

Cooking Class Deep-Dish Apple Pie

A perfect apple pie with a sweet filling and tender crust is within anyone's reach—if you follow these guidelines.

BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

Pick Two Kinds of Apples
For a perfectly balanced apple pie filling, choose one variety from each group

Add Acid
A tablespoon of lemon juice (added after the apples cook) adds a sharp, bright note to contrast and balance the sweetness of the sugar and fruit

Don't Make This Mistake
Using raw apples may seem like less work, but you risk a soupy pie with a giant air pocket between the top crust and the fruit. That's because apples shrink as they cook, oozing liquid. By cooking the apples before we put them in the pie, we can pack in more apples, control the amount of juice in the mix, and eliminate the crust gap. But don't rush the cooking or crank up the heat. The apples must be cooked gently (below 140 degrees) to keep them from becoming mushy when cooked further in the oven

Good to Know

GOOD IDEAS FOR ANY FRUIT PIE

Chill Your Pastry
Cold dough is less sticky and much easier to roll

Flour Your Counter
A floured counter helps minimize sticking. You can also place your dough disk between two pieces of plastic wrap or parchment paper to help keep it from sticking

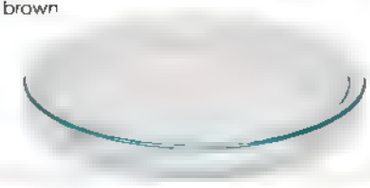
Roll in One Direction
Creating an even round of dough is easier when you roll in one direction only. Roll over the dough, rotate it a quarter turn, and then roll again. Repeat, adding flour as necessary, until you reach the desired diameter

Take It Easy on the Dough
If you roll it too aggressively or too many times, you'll end up with a tough, not tender, crust.

Put Your Pie Plate on a Baking Sheet
Baking your pie on a baking sheet doesn't just save your oven from overflows; it also helps promote a nice, brown crust on the bottom of the pie

Our Favorite Rolling Pin
We prefer a long, straight wooden rolling pin to one with handles; we find that it gives us a better "feel" for the dough. Our favorite, the **J.K. Adams Plain Maple Rolling Dowel**, has a slightly textured finish that holds a light dusting of flour to help keep the dough from sticking

Our Favorite Pie Dish
We're crazy about the **Pyrex Bakeware 9 Inch Pie Plate**, its ½-inch rim is just the right size, and its see-through bottom leaves no mystery as to when the crust is brown



STEP BY STEP **Perfect Deep-Dish Apple Pie**

1. COMBINE TART AND SWEET
Peel and slice 2½ pounds each of sweet and tart apples
WHY? Using two varieties adds full, complex flavor. And because different apples break down at different rates, a mix adds textural interest, too

2. PRECOOK THE APPLES
Cook the apples, sugars, and seasonings until the apples are tender but still hold their shape
WHY? Precooking the apples removes excess moisture so they won't shrink during baking. It also concentrates their flavor

3. COOL THE FRUIT
Spread the cooked apple mixture on a rimmed baking sheet to cool
WHY? Adding hot apples to the crust will melt the butter prematurely, and the crust will be dense rather than flaky

4. ROLL DOUGHS
Gently roll first dough into a 12-inch round and transfer to pie plate. Roll second dough to the same size and transfer to parchment-lined baking sheet.
WHY? A 12-inch round leaves just enough extra to seal and crimp together with the top crust

5. CHILL OUT
Wrap both doughs loosely with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes before filling and topping the pie
WHY? Chilling the doughs before assembling and baking the pie ensures that the crusts won't heat too fast and slump in the oven.

Illustration: Ross MacDonald

DEEP-DISH APPLE PIE Serves 8

You can substitute Empire or Cortland apples for the Granny Smiths and Jonagold, Fuji, or Braeburn apples for the Golden Delicious. A regular 9-inch pie plate works great; a deep-dish pie plate is not needed. Buy ready-made pie doughs or go to **CooksCountry.com/doublepiedough** for our recipe.

FILLING AND CRUST

- 2½ pounds Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored, halved, and sliced ¼ inch thick
- 2½ pounds Golden Delicious apples, peeled, cored, halved, and sliced ¼ inch thick
- ⅓ cup (3½ ounces) granulated sugar
- ¼ cup packed (1¾ ounces) light brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon grated lemon zest plus 1 tablespoon juice
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 (9-inch) pie doughs

TOPPING

- 1 large egg white, lightly beaten
- 1 teaspoon granulated sugar

1. FOR THE FILLING AND CRUST: Toss apples, granulated sugar, brown sugar, lemon zest, salt, and cinnamon together in Dutch oven. Cover and cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until apples are tender when poked with fork but still hold their shape, 15 to 20 minutes. Transfer apples and their juice to rimmed baking sheet and let cool completely, about 30 minutes.

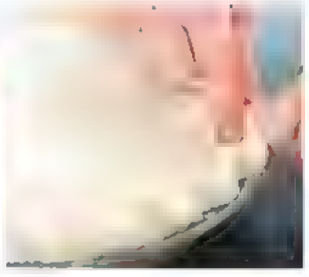
2. Roll 1 dough into 12 inch circle on lightly floured counter. (If dough is soft and/or sticky, refrigerate until firm.) Loosely roll dough around rolling pin and gently unroll it onto 9 inch pie plate, letting excess dough hang over edge. Ease dough into plate by gently lifting edge of dough with your hand while pressing into plate bottom with your other hand. Leave any dough that overhangs plate in place. Wrap dough lined plate loosely in plastic and refrigerate until dough is firm, about 30 minutes. Roll other dough into 12 inch circle on lightly floured counter, then transfer to parchment paper–lined baking sheet; cover with plastic and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

3. Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 425 degrees. Drain cooled apples thoroughly in colander set over bowl and reserve ¼ cup of juice. Stir lemon juice into reserved juice. Spread apples in dough lined plate, mounding them slightly in middle, and drizzle with apple juice mixture. Loosely roll remaining dough round around rolling pin and gently unroll it onto filling.

4. Trim overhang to ½ inch beyond lip of plate. Pinch edges of top and bottom crusts firmly together. Tuck overhang under itself, folded edge should be flush with edge of plate. Crimp dough around edge of plate using your fingers. Cut four 2 inch slits in top of dough.

5. FOR THE TOPPING: Brush surface with egg white and sprinkle with sugar. Set pie on parchment-lined rimmed baking sheet and bake until crust is light golden brown, about 30 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 375 degrees, rotate baking sheet, and continue to bake until juices are bubbling and crust is deep golden brown, 30 to 40 minutes longer. Transfer pie to wire rack and let cool until filling has set, about 2 hours; serve slightly warm or at room temperature.

6. DRAIN AND FILL
Transfer the apples to a large colander and drain off all but ¼ cup of juice. Pour the drained apples into the chilled bottom pie dough.
WHY? Controlling the amount of juice makes the pie moist but not soupy.



7. SEAL THE DEAL
Top filling with second chilled dough, pinch the top and bottom doughs together, tuck the overhang under itself, and crimp the dough.
WHY? This creates a tight seal so the filling stays inside the pie.

8. CUT STEAM VENTS
Cut four 2-inch slits in the dough.
WHY? The vents allow excess steam to escape so the crust doesn't rupture.

9. BAKE ON LINED SHEET
Set the pie on a parchment-lined rimmed baking sheet and bake it at 425 degrees for 30 minutes.
WHY? The baking sheet conducts heat evenly to promote browning of the bottom crust and catches any overflows before they make a mess of the oven.

10. LOWER HEAT TO FINISH
Reduce the oven temperature to 375 degrees to finish baking.
WHY? Reducing the heat ensures that the pie is cooked through before the edges become too dark.

Cooking for Two Chicken Tetrazzini

We set out to rescue this dish from leftovers land and return it to its creamy, cheesy roots—in a dish for two. BY KAT E LEAIRD

CHICKEN TETRAZZINI IS named for Luisa Tetrazzini, a celebrated Italian opera star. When critics questioned her fading talents during a United States tour in the early 1900s, she proclaimed, "I am old, I am fat, but I am still Tetrazzini." We wanted the same captivating but defiant grandeur, even in a simple week night dish for two.

Over the years, this cheesy, comfort ing suppertime casserole has deteriorated from an elegant dish of torn roasted chicken, broken strands of spaghetti, and flavorful shreds of cheese built on a velvety, sherry spiked cream sauce into a sloppy mash up of leftover poultry and canned cream of mushroom soup—an afterthought dish that mostly serves as a fridge clean out supper. Filling, yes, but without much personality.

Luisa deserves better, so I set out to revitalize this dish with fresh ingredients and timesaving techniques while also scaling it back from a bulky crowd feeder to a restrained but satisfying supper that would serve just two.

Easier said than done

I knew that I couldn't count on left over chicken being available in any given fridge, so I searched for the best way to cook the chicken. Poaching breasts in broth and shredding them took too much time. Sautéing thin slices of chicken took too much effort. Instead, I turned to one of the test kitchen's favorite convenience products: a freshly cooked rotisserie chicken from the grocery store; all I'd have to do was tear it into pieces.

The next order of business was the bread crumbs. Prefab crumbs were a no-go here; I wanted a fresh, tender bread crumb topping. Easy: I dropped a slice of white sandwich bread into the food processor and spun it for just a few seconds, until it was finely ground. I stirred in a bit of melted butter and set the crumbs aside to await their fate

I was on to the bigger challenge: an easy, flavorful cream sauce. I started by browning onions and mushrooms in a skillet, building a much needed flavor base for the sauce. I added chicken broth and heavy cream and then dropped broken spaghetti strands directly into the mixture.

In less than 10 minutes, the spaghetti was cooked and the sauce had reduced, plus, the starch released by the cooking pasta thickened the cream sauce without the need for an extra step. Some fresh thyme gave the sauce an herbal note, and the sherry contributed a hint of elegance

I added in the meat at the last minute so it wouldn't overcook and slid the skil let into the oven to brown. Tasters liked the result well enough, but there was room for another note of brightness—something to cut through the thickness of the sauce. But where to add it? I eyed the bread crumbs.

Though this dish is unequivocally American, it nonetheless has an Italian name. So I felt free to draw upon one of my favorite Italian add ins: gremolata. This mixture of finely chopped garlic, lemon zest, and parsley is often used as a condiment or ingredient in Italian cooking to pep up creamy or meaty dishes. I added these ingredients to the food processor along with the bread and let it rip. Then I assembled another skillet of Tetrazzini. Once it was out of the oven, we dug in. Success: The sharp acid from the lemon, the mild astrin gency from the parsley, and the subtle heat from the garlic refreshed the dish, cutting through the rich sauce

This simple but rich and satisfying chicken Tetrazzini, made with fresh ingredients and boasting full, round flavors, would make Luisa proud.

Gremolata: Adding Freshness

Rich, savory dishes like this one often benefit from a finish of something fresh and bright, like a squeeze of lemon or a sprinkling of fresh herbs. Gremolata, the classic Italian garnish for osso buco, adds garlic to the lemon and herb combination. For this recipe, we combine the gremolata ingredients (fresh parsley, lemon zest, and minced garlic) with bread crumbs to create a lively, crunchy topping.

A BURST OF FRESH FLAVOR
Parsley, lemon, garlic, and bread crumbs.

The pasta cooks right in the flavorful sauce for an easy (and tasty) weeknight dinner for two

CHICKEN TETRAZZINI FOR TWO

You can use a rasp-style grater to mince the garlic and grate the lemon zest. To contain runaway pieces, wrap the spaghetti in a kitchen towel before you break it. The peas needn't be defrosted for this recipe.

- 1 slice hearty white sandwich bread, torn into pieces
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
- 1 small garlic clove, minced
- ½ teaspoon grated lemon zest
- Salt and pepper
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter, melted, plus 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 7 ounces white mushrooms, trimmed and sliced thin
- ½ cup finely chopped onion
- 2¼ cups chicken broth
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 4 ounces spaghetti, broken into thirds
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme
- 2 ounces Gruyère cheese, shredded (½ cup)
- ½ cup frozen peas
- 1 tablespoon dry sherry
- 1½ cups shredded rotisserie chicken

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 475 degrees. Process bread, parsley, garlic, lemon zest, and ⅛ teaspoon salt in food processor until finely ground, about 15 seconds. Transfer crumbs to bowl and stir in melted butter; set aside.

2. Melt remaining 1 tablespoon butter in ovensafe 10-inch skillet over medium heat. Add mushrooms, onion, and ¼ teaspoon salt and cook until any moisture has evaporated and mushrooms are golden brown, 7 to 9 minutes.

3. Stir in broth, cream, pasta, and thyme. Bring to simmer and cook, stirring often, until pasta is just tender and sauce is slightly thickened, about 9 minutes

4. Off heat, stir in Gruyère, peas, and sherry until combined. Stir in chicken until fully incorporated. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

5. Sprinkle bread crumb mixture over top. Transfer skillet to oven and bake until topping is golden brown and casserole is bubbling lightly around edges, about 10 minutes. Let rest for 10 minutes. Serve

One-Pan Dinner Pork with Green Beans and Potatoes

An unexpected ingredient solved two problems in this easy weeknight dinner. BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

MILD-FLAVORED, LEAN PORK tenderloin makes a great weeknight meal because it is relatively inexpensive, cooks quickly, and takes well to a wide variety of flavors. I set out to make an easy but flavorful dinner of two pork tenderloins and a few vegetables on a single baking sheet—easy cooking, easy cleanup.

To start my testing, I looked for two vegetables that would cook at a similar rate to the pork. Since pork tenderloins can reach their optimal temperature of 140 degrees in as little as 20 minutes at 450 degrees, most root vegetables, which take much longer to cook, were out. Thin fingerling potatoes (halved lengthwise), however, worked well, cooking through in the same time it took to cook the pork. Now I needed a green vegetable to complete the meal.

Green beans, which are great roasted, came to mind. I was disappointed, then, when the green beans that I roasted with the pork and potatoes became tough and chewy from the intense dry heat. For my next test, I tried insulating the beans by positioning the tenderloins directly on top of them. This method effectively steamed the green beans to a crisp-tender texture.

When I removed the tenderloins from the baking sheet, however, I noticed that while the potatoes and beans had cooked through, they hadn't picked up much tasty browning. To remedy this lack of color, I returned the vegetables to the oven while the pork rested (a necessary post-roast step that ensures juiciness). Ten minutes later, both the spuds and the green beans were browned and tender, and the pork was ready for slicing.

But while the pork was moist and juicy, it needed a little help in the flavor department. It also looked a little pale without a browned crust. I could give it one by cooking it more (either under the broiler or in a sauté pan), but I knew that, while it would be brown, it would also be dry.

My fix: a sweet glaze. Since sugars caramelize and brown faster than meat, I knew that coating the meat with one would improve its appearance and flavor. But I came up short with maple syrup (too sweet), honey (too sticky), and brown sugar (too molasses-y). What's more, each provided sweetness but not much else. Inspiration appeared in a jar of hoisin sauce. This thick, dark, potent Chinese sauce is made of soybeans, ginger, chiles, garlic, and sugar—it's a staple ingredient in stir-fries. I brushed some of it on the tenderloins. After 25 minutes in the oven, the pork picked up just the right amount of sweetness and a rounded, unexpected complexity from the hoisin. Tasters couldn't quite identify the secret flavor, but they sure liked it.

To give this dinner a little extra oomph, I mashed together softened butter, chives, and minced garlic and dotted the hot pork with this flavored butter while the meat was resting and the vegetables were finishing up in the oven. I saved some to toss with the browned potatoes and green beans, too.

Arrangement Counts

Placing the tenderloins directly over the green beans creates steam, which helps the beans cook through without drying out. The drippings from the meat also help flavor the green beans.

Hoisin sauce adds subtle depth of flavor and gives the pork a beautiful brown color.

ONE-PAN PORK TENDERLOIN WITH GREEN BEANS AND POTATOES

Serves 4 to 6

Buy tenderloins that are of equal size and weight so they cook at the same rate. A rasp-style grater makes quick work of turning the garlic into a paste. Our favorite hoisin sauce is Kikkoman's.

- **4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened**
- **2 tablespoons minced fresh chives**
- **1 garlic clove, minced to paste**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **2 (1-pound) pork tenderloins, trimmed**
- **¼ cup hoisin sauce**
- **1 pound green beans, trimmed**
- **3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- **1½ pounds fingerling potatoes, unpeeled, halved lengthwise**

1. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Combine butter, chives, garlic, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in bowl; set aside. Pat pork dry with paper towels and season with pepper. Brush tenderloins all over with hoisin sauce.

2. Toss green beans, 1 tablespoon oil, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in large bowl. Arrange green bean mixture crosswise down center of rimmed baking sheet, leaving room on both sides for potatoes. Toss potatoes, remaining 2 tablespoons oil, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in now-empty bowl. Arrange potatoes, cut side down, on both sides of green beans.

3. Lay tenderloins, side by side without touching, lengthwise on top of green beans. Roast until pork registers 140 degrees, 20 to 25 minutes. Transfer tenderloins to carving board and dot each with 1 tablespoon reserved herb butter. Tent with aluminum foil and let rest while vegetables finish cooking.

4. Gently stir vegetables on sheet to combine. Return sheet to oven and roast until vegetables are tender and golden brown, 5 to 10 minutes longer. Remove from oven, add remaining 2 tablespoons herb butter to sheet, and toss vegetables to coat. Transfer vegetables to platter. Cut pork into ½-inch-thick slices and place over vegetables, pouring any accumulated juices over top. Serve.

Slow Cooker Chicken with 40 Cloves of Garlic

This classic French braise features tender chicken and sweet (not harsh) garlic. Could we make it work in the slow cooker? BY CECELIA JENKINS

THIS TRADITIONAL FRENCH recipe consists of bone-in chicken pieces and garlic cloves braised in broth until tender. It's typically served with crusty bread, which is the perfect thing to smear with softened garlic cloves and use to mop up the sauce. The garlic in this dish mellows and turns sweet with the long cooking—surprisingly, it's not an excessively garlicky dish.

I did find some slow-cooker recipes for this dish in our cookbook library, but come tasting time, none of them turned out to be very good. The most glaring problem was garlic cloves that kept too much of their dragon-like bite. The next concern was that the sauces tasted wan and washed out; they were also either sludgy and too thick, or too brothy and thin. I knew I could do better.

I began my testing with the garlic, which, somewhat surprisingly, didn't lose its raw edge by the time the chicken was cooked through. Fortunately, past test kitchen recipes provided a possible solution: jump-starting the garlic in the microwave. I microwaved the garlic just until it had a slight give, which took about 4 minutes, this quick precooking step made for garlic that was mostly sweet and creamy in the finished dish. Adding a little sugar to this microwaving step gave the garlic (and thus the sauce) more complexity and roundness.

For the chicken, I had been using a mix of bone-in pieces, which were cooking irregularly. I switched to bone-in thighs, which all cooked at the same rate. Plus, their dark meat could stand up to longer cooking without drying out. Browning them in a skillet before adding them to the slow cooker left lots of flavorful fond in the skillet. I added the microwaved garlic to the skillet so that it, too, could pick up some browning, and then I deglazed with sherry to incorporate the potent browned bits into the braising liquid. Next I added the broth, brought the mixture to a boil, and transferred it to the slow cooker. I was making progress, but the dish was a little bland and some of the garlic cloves weren't quite soft and mellow enough.

To ensure that the cloves cooked fully in the slow cooker, I layered them all in first and placed the chicken on top to keep the garlic submerged. This was also advantageous for the chicken skin, which now sat above the liquid and thus didn't become rubbery. Adding some sprigs of thyme to the braise and finishing the sauce with fresh parsley and lemon gave the dish the extra boost of flavor it needed. Pass the baguette, please.

Bone-in chicken thighs have great flavor and take well to braising

SLOW-COOKER CHICKEN WITH 40 CLOVES OF GARLIC

Serves 4 to 6

You will need three or four heads of garlic to yield 40 cloves, or you can purchase prepeeled garlic instead. To avoid flare-ups, be sure to remove the skillet from the heat when adding the sherry. The chicken is only browned on the skin side.

- 40 garlic cloves, peeled
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- ½ teaspoon sugar
- 8 (5- to 7-ounce) bone-in chicken thighs, trimmed
- Salt and pepper
- ⅔ cup dry sherry
- ½ cup chicken broth
- 4 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
- 1 (12-inch) baguette, sliced ¾ inch thick on bias

1. Combine garlic, 1 teaspoon oil, and sugar in bowl. Cover and microwave until garlic is translucent and yields slightly when squeezed, about 4 minutes, stirring halfway through cooking. Pour off any liquid from garlic bowl and set garlic aside.

2. Pat chicken dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat remaining 1 teaspoon oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook chicken skin side down until well browned, about 10 minutes. Transfer chicken to plate, skin side up. Pour off all but 2 tablespoons fat from skillet.

3. Add microwaved garlic to fat in skillet and cook over medium-high heat until lightly browned, 1 to 2 minutes. Off heat, stir in sherry; return skillet to heat and cook until nearly evaporated, about 4 minutes, scraping up any browned bits. Add broth and thyme sprigs and bring to boil.

4. Transfer garlic-broth mixture to slow cooker. Nestle chicken skin side up on top of garlic cloves (garlic should be completely covered). Cover and cook on low until chicken registers 175 degrees, about 3 hours.

5. Transfer chicken to platter. Discard thyme sprigs, add lemon juice, parsley, ⅛ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper to sauce. Pour sauce around chicken and serve with baguette slices.

KEY STEP **Microwaving Garlic**

To make sure they fully soften, we give the garlic cloves a head start by microwaving them briefly before browning them in chicken fat and adding them to the braising liquid.

JUST TRANSLUCENT
Precook the garlic until it looks like this.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE

A Smart Arrangement

We put the braising liquid—which includes the garlic cloves—in the insert first and then nestle the browned chicken on top. This keeps the garlic submerged so it can cook to tenderness evenly and prevents the chicken skin from getting too soggy.

Illustration: Lauren Pettapiece

Five Easy Recipes Breakfast Scrambles

The secret to no-fuss scrambled eggs is not what you put in them—it's what you leave out. BY CECELIA JENKINS

WHEN MY COLLEAGUES and chef friends are making themselves breakfast, more often than not they are making scrambled eggs with a bunch of, well, stuff in them

And why not? Breakfast scrambles are less fussy than omelets (no fancy folding or rolling to potentially botch), and they happily serve as a blank canvas for just about anything you have around: leftover vegetables, herbs, cheeses, leftover meats, and so on. I set out to come up with a basic method and five hearty, great tasting versions of breakfast scrambles

First off, because we're adding other flavorful ingredients, there is no need to add milk, cream, half and half, extra egg yolks, or any other fatty, rich ingredient to the beaten eggs. But that doesn't mean there isn't a correct way to make a breakfast scramble

After several days of cracking, beating, and scrambling, I came up with the basic technique to serve two. First, beat five eggs with nothing more than salt and pepper. Then, melt a tablespoon of unsalted butter in a 10 inch nonstick skillet over medium high heat, add the eggs, and stir constantly with a heat resistant rubber spatula until the eggs begin to clump, which takes about 2 minutes. Then—and this is important—reduce the heat to low, sprinkle in your add ins, and gently and constantly fold the eggs until fully clumped but still slightly wet, just about 45 seconds more. Immediately transfer the eggs to warmed plates, where they will continue to firm up due to their residual heat, and serve

I wanted to keep the add ins simple and straightforward. Grated extra sharp cheddar, minced scallion, and minced pickled jalapeños made for a scramble with richness and zip. Black Forest ham and shredded Gruyère cheese elevated a tried and true combination. Buttery Havarti cheese was a great match for fresh dill, and chopped chives brought freshness to a scramble starring smoked trout. My last variation featured the classic Greek pairing of briny feta cheese and spinach; for this one, I had to briefly wilt the spinach in the pan before adding the eggs, but it was still easy to throw together—even before my first cup of coffee.

Our breakfast scramble add-ins bring a lot of flavor without a lot of fuss.

CHEDDAR AND PICKLED JALAPEÑO BREAKFAST SCRAMBLE

Serves 2

It is important to follow visual cues, as pan thickness will affect cooking times. If using an electric stove, heat one burner on low heat and a second on medium-high heat; move the skillet between burners when it's time to adjust the heat

- **5 large eggs**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **1 tablespoon unsalted butter**
- **1 ounce extra-sharp cheddar cheese, shredded (¼ cup)**
- **1 scallion, minced**
- **1 tablespoon minced pickled jalapeños**

1. Beat eggs, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ⅛ teaspoon pepper with fork in bowl until eggs are thoroughly combined and mixture is pure yellow; do not overbeat.

2. Melt butter in 10 inch nonstick skillet over medium high heat, swirling to coat pan. Add egg mixture and, using heat resistant rubber spatula, constantly and firmly scrape along bottom and sides of skillet until eggs begin to clump and spatula leaves trail on bottom of skillet, 1½ to 2½ minutes

3. Reduce heat to low and add cheddar, scallion, and jalapeños. Gently but constantly fold eggs until clumped and slightly wet, 30 to 60 seconds. Immediately transfer eggs to warmed plates and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately

HAM AND GRUYÈRE BREAKFAST SCRAMBLE

Substitute ½ cup chopped Black Forest ham and ¼ cup shredded Gruyère for cheddar, scallion, and jalapeños.

HAVARTI AND DILL BREAKFAST SCRAMBLE

Substitute ½ cup shredded Havarti and 1½ teaspoons minced fresh dill for cheddar, scallion, and jalapeños.

SMOKED TROUT AND CHIVE BREAKFAST SCRAMBLE

Substitute ½ cup flaked smoked trout and 1 tablespoon minced fresh chives for cheddar, scallion, and jalapeños.

SPINACH AND FETA BREAKFAST SCRAMBLE

Omit scallion and jalapeños. Add 2 cups chopped baby spinach to melted butter in step 2 before adding eggs and cook until wilted, about 1 minute. Substitute ¼ cup crumbled feta cheese for cheddar

Equipment Review Slicing Knives

Want perfect slices at your holiday table? Lose the chef's knife.

BY HANNAH CROWLEY

THERE YOU ARE at the head of the table, with family and friends arrayed expectantly on either side. You've got a carving fork in one hand and a chef's knife in the other. It doesn't end well. Before long, the rosy roast is reduced to a pitiful pile of slabs and shaggy slivers.

If you're spending time and money on a special meal, it's worth getting the right tool to serve it. Unlike shorter chef's knives and pointed, flexible carving knives, slicing knives are long and straight for smooth, even slicing. They have rounded tips so as to be less threatening for tableside serving.

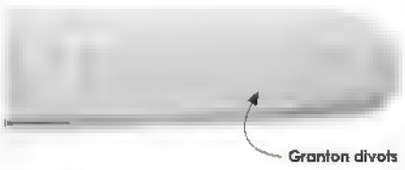
For years, when we wanted perfect slices, we turned to a nearly $55 12-inch slicing knife from Victorinox. To see if it's still the best, we retested it against seven new knives, priced from roughly $28 to $118, by slicing more than 150 pounds of turkey breast and roast beef and rating each knife on its handle, blade, sharpness, and agility.

Comfortable, grippy handles were imperative, as was the right degree of flexibility. Bendy blades bailed out midcut, leaving behind ragged slices. Stiff blades went where they wanted, not where we asked. Subtle but present flexibility allowed for control and strength.

Length mattered, too. We had to insert shorter blades to the hilt to get a full slice, causing our knuckles to brush against the meat; longer blades gave us more room to work. We also liked taller blades because they put more distance between our fingers and the sharpened edge. Called a bevel, this edge tapers to a point like a V and ranged from 14 to 20 degrees wide on either side, depending on the knife. As in our chef's knife evaluations, we preferred narrower blades because they're sharper.

Lastly, when it came to those scalloped divots called Grantons that dot the side of many knives, we preferred blades with them. And we spoke to N. Brian Huegel, knife expert and owner of Country Knives Inc., in Intercourse, Pennsylvania, to understand why. According to Huegel, Grantons break up the resistance on the blade, and the reduced friction makes it easier to cut even slices, thick or thin.

In the end the Victorinox ($54.65) wowed us all over again. "I feel like I can do anything with this knife," said one tester. It was long, tall, sharp, and just flexible enough to give us utter control and perfect slices.



A Clean Cut
Our favorite slicing knife has a long blade for smooth slicing; a tight 15-degree bevel for thin, even cuts, and Granton divots, which keep the meat from sticking to the blade.

THIN WINS
We wanted even slices every time.

KEY **Good** ★★★ **Fair** ★★ **Poor** ★

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

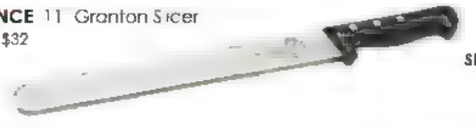
VICTORINOX 12" Fibrox Granton Edge Slicing/Carving Knife
Model: 47645 **Price:** $54.65
Blade Length: 12 in
Blade Height: 1.5 in
Blade Angle: 15°

CRITERIA	
Handle	★★★
Blade	★★★
Sharpness	★★★
Agility	★★★

Our previous winner turned in another gold-medal performance. "Every slice is perfect," said one tester. It was comfortable and sharp, with a long, tall blade that was "just flexible enough so you feel like it's doing what you tell it to."

RECOMMENDED

MERCER RENAISSANCE 11" Granton Slicer
Model: M23720 **Price:** $32
Blade Length: 11 in
Blade Height: 1.25 in
Blade Angle: 15°



CRITERIA	
Handle	★★½
Blade	★★★
Sharpness	★★★
Agility	★★½

This blade felt "sharp" and "flexible but not too much." Though a few testers disliked the pronounced tab on its underside, its rounded handle felt "intuitive" to most, and its classic black riveted design was particularly elegant—nice for tableside slicing.

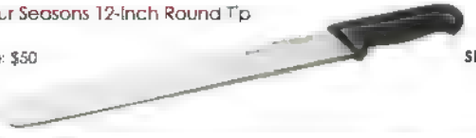
WÜSTHOF PRO 11-inch Hollow Edge Slicing Knife
Model: 4859 **Price:** $44.95
Blade Length: 11 in
Blade Height: 1.13 in
Blade Angle: 14°

CRITERIA	
Handle	★★
Blade	★★★
Sharpness	★★★
Agility	★★½

This agile blade was long and sharp and moved through meat with a controlled, even stroke. The handle felt grippy but had a deep divot underneath, which put some testers' index fingers in an "awkward" position.

RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS

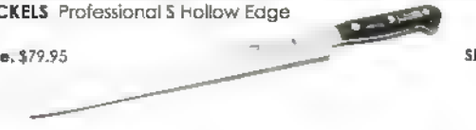
MESSERMEISTER Four Seasons 12-Inch Round Tip Kullenschliff Slicer
Model: 5018-12K **Price:** $50
Blade Length: 12 in
Blade Height: 1.25 in
Blade Angle: 20°



CRITERIA	
Handle	★★½
Blade	★★½
Sharpness	★★
Agility	★★

This knife's wide, thick blade felt dull and seemed like "more work" to cut with. A few testers also found its handle too fat for comfort.

ZWILLING J.A. HENCKELS Professional S Hollow Edge Slicing Knife
Model: 31121-263 **Price:** $79.95
Blade Length: 10 in
Blade Height: 1.07 in
Blade Angle: 15°



CRITERIA	
Handle	★★
Blade	★★
Sharpness	★★
Agility	★★

This knife felt "well constructed" and "sharp" but slightly too short. Its handle was small, too, so testers banged their knuckles on the cutting board.

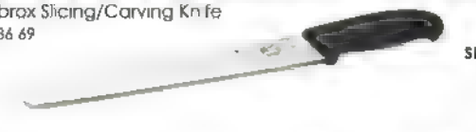
NOT RECOMMENDED

GLOBAL Roast Slicer
Model: G-8 **Price:** $117.95
Blade Length: 8.5 in
Blade Height: 1.3 in
Blade Angle: 15°

CRITERIA	
Handle	★★★
Blade	½
Sharpness	★★★
Agility	★

This knife was sharp and had an ergonomic handle, but it was too short. "My fingers are running into the meat," said one tester. The company makes a longer version, but it doesn't sell it in the States. We hope it does soon.

VICTORINOX 10" Fibrox Slicing/Carving Knife
Model: 47542 **Price:** $36.69
Blade Length: 10 in
Blade Height: 1.17 in
Blade Angle: 15°



CRITERIA	
Handle	★★
Blade	★
Sharpness	★★
Agility	★½

This knife lacked Grantons, so testers had to "work harder" to get a decent slice. Since it was too short in both directions, testers had to take extra care not to touch the meat, and they banged their knuckles on the cutting board.

ERGO Chef 12" Prodigy Slicing Knife with Hollow Grounds
Model: 2012 **Price:** $27.99
Blade Length: 12 in
Blade Height: 1.2 in
Blade Angle: 18°

CRITERIA	
Handle	★½
Blade	★
Sharpness	★★
Agility	★

This "heavy and dull" knife had a thick spine, a wide blade angle, and a potbelly underneath its handle that "splayed open" our hands, stressing our fingers and weakening our grip.

Taste Test Preshredded Parmesan Cheese

Shredding cheese is time-consuming. Is there an acceptable shortcut even skeptics can get behind?

BY LAUREN SAVOIE

NOTHING BEATS THE savory saltiness of real Parmigiano-Reggiano, the name-protected aged cheese made in Parma, Italy, according to strict traditional standards. Cheese made in the same style anywhere else or by less exacting standards is just called "Parmesan." The distinction can bring a drop in flavor but also a big drop in cost: Parmigiano-Reggiano often costs twice as much as domestic Parmesan.

We've recommended a number of domestic Parmesan wedges in the past, but when we polled our readers we learned that more than half use preshredded or grated Parmesan for topping weeknight pasta dinners or in cheese-heavy dishes like polenta or risotto. As Parm purists, we were skeptical—but if there was a good shortcut out there, we wanted to know about it. So we gathered seven nationally available preshredded Parmesans (we couldn't find preshredded Parmigiano-Reggiano that was widely available) and tasted each plain, atop sauced pasta, and melted into polenta.

Texture was the biggest issue. Compared with the fluffy strands of freshly shredded cheese, some preshredded Parmesans were stiff and fibrous. To get a closer look at shred size, we sifted equal amounts of each cheese through a strainer, weighing the small bits that fell through the 4-millimeter holes and the larger strands that remained. Brands with more than 75 percent large shreds left goopy strings in polenta, while products with more small bits (up to 50 percent) were mealy on pasta. We preferred Parmesan that had one-third small shreds and two-thirds large. (When following recipes, we recommend measuring Parmesan by weight instead of volume to account for varying shred sizes.)

We also wanted flavor that matched the punch of real Parmigiano-Reggiano. Tasters chided lower-ranked products for their bland flavor. We examined ingredient labels thinking that salt might be the culprit, but while no product matched the 433 milligrams of sodium per ounce found in real Parmigiano-Reggiano, only one "too bland" product suffered from too little sodium (252 milligrams, compared with 336 milligrams and up in top-ranked cheeses).

We needed more information, so we sent the cheeses to a lab for analysis. According to the consortium that oversees its regulation, Parmigiano-Reggiano has 8 grams of fat and 8.7 grams of moisture per ounce. Our favorite preshredded product came back with results that almost matched: 7.9 grams of fat and 8.6 grams of moisture, which translated into the firm, crystalline bite and complex buttery richness we associate with real Parm. Lower-ranked cheeses varied from Parmigiano-Reggiano by up to 4 grams of fat and 2 grams of moisture and were, in turn, overly soft, stiff, or bland.

Which led us to the question: Could our favorite preshredded Parmesan stand a chance against real deal Parmigiano-Reggiano? We held a final blind taste test with new batches of pasta and polenta. Most tasters still preferred the subtle tang and nutty flavor of Parmigiano-Reggiano, but our new winner held its own, especially in polenta, where tasters remarked that it was "rich," "cheesy," and "creamy."

When we have the time and money, we still prefer freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano, but we found acceptable shredded alternatives. Sargento Artisan Blends Shredded Parmesan Cheese came out on top for its "nutty," "rich" flavor and "softer," medium-size shreds. Though most manufacturers wouldn't disclose aging information, we learned that Sargento is made with a blend of 10- and 18-month-aged Parmesan for extra "punchy" flavor. At $0.80 per ounce, it's only slightly cheaper than real Parmigiano-Reggiano ($1.00 per ounce) but requires less prep time for fairly comparable flavor.

What's the Deal with the Green Can?

Many of us grew up shaking piles of Kraft Grated Parmesan onto our pasta. Is nostalgia the only merit to the green can? We tried the powdered stuff (which is finely grated Parmesan that's been tossed with cellulose powder to prevent caking) on pasta and in polenta. Most tasters found it "bland," "powdery," and "dusty," even when mixed into hot polenta. On pasta, it was "like a mountain of sawdust" with "no discernible cheese flavor." While a few tasters gave Kraft "points for nostalgia," most agreed that this product was best left for "childhood pasta dinners."

RECOMMENDED

SARGENTO Artisan Blends Shredded Parmesan Cheese
Price: $3.99 for 5 oz ($0.80 per oz)
Sodium: 336 mg per oz
Fat: 7.9 g per oz
Moisture: 8.6 g per oz
Size of Shreds: 34% small, 66% large

TASTERS' NOTES
A mix of small and large shreds lent this blend of 10- and 18-month-aged Parmesan a "fluffy," "lighter" texture that was "perfectly smooth" and "creamy" in polenta. Atop pasta, this cheese's "mild sharpness" and "nutty" flavor were reminiscent of "freshly shredded" Parmesan.

KRAFT Natural Cheese Shredded Parmesan Cheese
Price: $4.08 for 7 oz ($0.58 per oz)
Sodium: 400 mg per oz
Fat: 7.8 g per oz
Moisture: 7.8 g per oz
Size of Shreds: 40% small, 60% large

The more refined cousin of the ubiquitous green can, this refrigerated Parmesan was "bold" and "tangy," with a "slightly salty" kick. Tasters liked this product's smaller shreds, which distributed well in pasta and made for "silky" polenta.

RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS

DIGIORNO Shredded Parmesan
Price: $3.84 for 5.04 oz ($0.76 per oz)
Sodium: 400 mg per oz
Fat: 7.6 g per oz
Moisture: 8.0 g per oz
Size of Shreds: 30% small, 70% large

In polenta, these moderately sized strands produced a "sharp," "distinctly Parmesan" flavor and "creamy" texture. While many tasters appreciated their "buttery," "nutty" notes on pasta, a few remarked that their texture was "a bit plasticky."

4C Homestyle Shredded Parmesan
Price: $4.99 for 6 oz ($0.83 per oz)
Sodium: 392 mg per oz
Fat: 4.1 g per oz
Moisture: 6.9 g per oz
Size of Shreds: 50% small, 50% large

Small and "waxy," these shreds were "chewy" and "stiff" on pasta but melted easily in polenta for a "silky" "even" texture. Most tasters thought that this cheese was "sweet" and "nutty," though a few picked up on a "slight sour" aftertaste.

FRIGO Shredded Parmesan Cheese
Price: $2.44 for 5 oz ($0.49 per oz)
Sodium: 380 mg per oz
Fat: 7.6 g per oz
Moisture: 8.8 g per oz
Size of Shreds: 23% small, 77% large

These "softer," "fluffy" strands nailed the ideal Parmesan texture but fell flat on flavor. Tasters noted that these shreds were "tart" and "slightly sour," with an aftertaste reminiscent of "Swiss cheese." Off flavors were muted when mixed into polenta.

STELLA Shredded Parmesan Cheese
Price: $3.99 for 5 oz ($0.80 per oz)
Sodium: 380 mg per oz
Fat: 7.5 g per oz
Moisture: 9.0 g per oz
Size of Shreds: 17% small, 83% large

While some tasters enjoyed the "mild," "slightly sweet" flavor of these shreds, others found this product "bland" and "boring." Most agreed that these strands were too large and "stiff," making for "stringy" pasta and "clumpy" polenta.

NOT RECOMMENDED

BELGIOIOSO Shredded Parmesan
Price: $2.91 for 4.24 oz ($0.69 per oz)
Sodium: 252 mg per oz
Fat: 8.7 g per oz
Moisture: 6.8 g per oz
Size of Shreds: 7% small, 93% large

While this product is made from our favorite domestic wedge Parmesan, these "long" and "chewy" strands were compared to "candle wax" and "twigs" when sampled on pasta. They were no better in polenta, where they congealed into "gloppy," "stringy" masses. Tasters also noted that this cheese was "a little too bland" as a result of its lower salt level.

Heirloom Recipe

We're looking for recipes that you treasure—the ones that have been handed down in your family for a generation or more; that always come out for the holidays; that have earned a place at your table and in your heart, through many years of meals. Send us the recipes that spell home to you. Visit **CooksCountry.com/magazines/home** (or write to Heirloom Recipes, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447); click on Heirloom Recipes and tell us a little about the recipe. Include your name and mailing address. **If we print your recipe, you'll receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*.**

BOURBON BALLS **Makes about 24 balls**

Kent Burnet of Phoenix, Ariz., writes: "My parents always served these at holiday parties when I was a kid in Asheville, North Carolina. But I never understood the appeal until I grew up and began to appreciate bourbon."

Either Dutch-processed or natural cocoa powder can be used in this recipe. These bourbon balls can be refrigerated in an airtight container for up to one week.

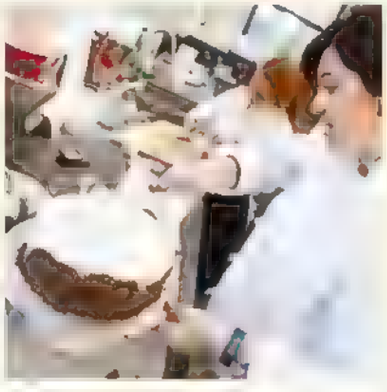
- **2½ cups (6 ounces) vanilla wafers**
- **1 cup pecans, toasted**
- **½ cup (2 ounces) confectioners' sugar**
- **6 tablespoons bourbon**
- **3 tablespoons light corn syrup**
- **1½ tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder**
- **½ cup (3½ ounces) granulated sugar**

1. Process vanilla wafers and pecans in food processor until finely ground, about 15 seconds. Transfer to large bowl. Stir in confectioners' sugar, bourbon, corn syrup, and cocoa.

2. Working with 1 heaping tablespoon at a time, shape mixture into 1-inch balls and roll in granulated sugar. Transfer balls to large plate and refrigerate until firm, at least 1 hour. Serve.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

The menu is full in our December/January issue. Besides an excellent recipe for **Prime Rib and Potatoes** suitable for the holiday table, we scoured the country for regional favorites, from **Philadelphia Swiss Haus Hazelnut Cake** to **Michigan Cornish Pasties** to **Miami Coconut Shrimp**. We'll also show you the secrets to perfect **Herb-Roasted Chicken**, **One-Pot Baked Ziti with Sausage and Spinach**, and a full suite of supereasy, crowd-pleasing, and swap-ready **Holiday Cookies**.



RECIPE INDEX

Main courses

Baked Mustard Chicken 12
Bratwurst Reuben RC
Breakfast Scrambles 29
- **Cheddar and Pickled Jalapeño**
- **Ham and Gruyère**
- **Havarti and Dill**
- **Smoked Trout and Chive**
- **Spinach and Feta**

Chicken Tetrazzini for Two 26
Flank Steak with Peanut Slaw RC
Italian Steak Modiga 17
One-Pan Pork Tenderloin with Green Beans and Potatoes 27
Pan-Roasted Salmon with Fennel and Orange Salad RC
Penne with Butternut Squash and Brown Butter Sauce RC
Pennsylvania Dutch Chicken and Corn Soup 10
Pork and Ricotta Meatballs 7
Puffy Tacos 9
Quick Beef and Vegetable Soup RC
Roasted Chicken Thighs with Creamed Shallots and Bacon RC
Shrimp Creole 13
Skillet Pork Chops with Apples and Maple-Sage Butter RC
Slow-Cooker Chicken with 40 Cloves of Garlic 28
Turkey Cutlets with Barley and Swiss Chard RC
Two-Hour Turkey and Gravy 19
Wisconsin Butter Burgers 5

Sides and salads

Brussels Sprout Gratin 22
Candied Sweet Potatoes 21
Cornmeal Drop Biscuits 23
- **with Black Pepper** 23
- **with Green Chiles** 23
- **with Sage** 23

Sourdough Dressing with Kale and Mushrooms 20
Spaghetti Squash Salad with Chickpeas and Feta 11
Spinach Salad with Gorgonzola and Pear 7

Sweets

B-52 Cake INSIDE BACK COVER
Bourbon Balls 32
Cranberry–Sour Cream Pound Cake 14
Dark Chocolate–Cherry Brownies 15
Deep-Dish Apple Pie 25

FIND THE ROOSTER!

A tiny version of this rooster has been hidden in the pages of this issue. Write to us with its location and we'll enter you in a random drawing. The first correct entry drawn will win our winning slicing knife, and each of the next five will receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*. To enter visit **CooksCountry.com/rooster** by November 30, 2015, or write to Rooster ON15, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Include your name and address. Kate Kettles of Dallas, Texas, found the rooster in the June/July 2015 issue on page 10 and won a set of our favorite potholders.

WEB EXTRAS

Free for 4 months online

Basic Brownies
California Fish Tacos
Creamy Mashed Potatoes
Double-Crust Pie Dough
Field Notes: Milwaukee
Field Notes: San Antonio
Frozen French Fry Tasting
Maryland Crab Fluff
Roasting Rack Testing (full story and chart)
Rolled Soufflé for a Crowd
Spaghetti Squash Salad with Radishes and Queso Fresco
Spaghetti Squash Salad with Tomatoes and Pecorino

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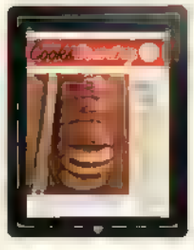

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30 MINJTE SUPPER

BRATWURST REUBEN

30 MINUTE SUPPER

TURKEY CUTLETS WITH BARLEY AND SWISS CHARD

30 MINJTE SUPPER

PAN-ROASTED SALMON
WITH FENNEL AND ORANGE SALAD

30 MINUTE SUPPER

QUICK BEEF AND VEGETABLE SOUP

TURKEY CUTLETS WITH BARLEY AND SWISS CHARD Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Caramelizing the lemon infuses the cooking oil (and, thus, the cutlets) with flavor.

- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup quick-cooking barley
- ¼ cup finely chopped onion
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1¾ cups chicken broth
- 12 ounces Swiss chard, stems chopped, leaves cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest, plus 1 lemon, halved and seeded
- Salt and pepper
- 1½ ounces Parmesan cheese, shredded (½ cup)
- 6 (4-ounce) turkey cutlets, trimmed

1. Heat 2 tablespoons oil in large saucepan over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add barley, onion, and garlic and cook until barley is toasted and onion is softened, about 3 minutes. Stir in broth and bring to boil, reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer until barley is almost tender, about 8 minutes.

2. Add chard stems and cook, covered, until softened, about 3 minutes. Add chard leaves, lemon zest, and ½ teaspoon salt; increase heat to medium-high and cook, uncovered, until barley is tender, about 2 minutes. Stir in ¼ cup Parmesan, transfer to serving platter, and tent with foil.

3. Pat cutlets dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add lemon halves, cut side down, and cook until browned, about 2 minutes; set aside. Cook cutlets in now-empty skillet until well browned, about 2 minutes per side. Arrange cutlets on top of barley mixture and squeeze lemon halves over cutlets. Sprinkle with remaining ¼ cup Parmesan and serve.

BRATWURST REUBEN Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: We remove the casings and brown bratwurst sausages for a quick, supermeaty Reuben-style sandwich.

- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- 8 slices hearty rye bread
- 4 cooked bratwurst sausages, halved lengthwise
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons whole-grain mustard
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 1 tablespoon dill pickle relish
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 8 thin slices deli Swiss cheese (8 ounces)
- 1 cup sauerkraut, drained

1. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Spread 1 teaspoon butter on 1 side of each bread slice. Place bread slices, buttered side down, on baking sheet; set aside.

2. Melt remaining 1 teaspoon butter in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add bratwurst in single layer, weigh down with Dutch oven, and cook until well browned, about 2 minutes per side.

3. Whisk mayonnaise, mustard, ketchup, relish, and salt together in bowl and spread evenly on facing sides of each bread slice. Place 1 slice cheese on each of 4 bread slices, then layer each with one-quarter of sauerkraut and browned bratwurst, finishing with 1 slice cheese. Top with remaining 4 bread slices, buttered side up; press down to flatten. Bake until golden brown on both sides and cheese is melted, about 12 minutes, flipping sandwiches halfway through baking. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Make sure to buy fully cooked bratwurst, which is usually sold near the hot dogs, for this recipe.

QUICK BEEF AND VEGETABLE SOUP Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Quick-cooking ground beef is a great alternative to beef cubes for a meaty, satisfying soup that's ready in half an hour.

- 1 pound 90 percent lean ground beef
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, peeled and cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- Salt and pepper
- 4 cups beef broth
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes
- 8 ounces Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cut into ½-inch pieces
- 6 ounces green beans, trimmed and cut on bias into 1-inch lengths
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

1. Cook beef, onion, carrots, oregano, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in Dutch oven over medium-high heat, breaking up beef with spoon, until no longer pink, about 6 minutes. Add broth, tomatoes and their juice, and potatoes. Bring to boil, reduce heat to low, and simmer, covered, until potatoes are almost tender, about 10 minutes.

2. Add green beans and cook, uncovered, until vegetables are tender and soup has thickened slightly, 10 to 12 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve, sprinkled with parsley.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: You can substitute chicken broth for the beef broth if you prefer.

PAN-ROASTED SALMON WITH FENNEL AND ORANGE SALAD Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: The brightness of the citrus balances the richness of the seared salmon. The crunch of the fennel adds textural contrast.

- 2 oranges
- 1 fennel bulb, 1 tablespoon fronds minced, stalks discarded, bulb quartered, cored, and sliced thin crosswise
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar
- Salt and pepper
- 4 (6-ounce) skinless center-cut salmon fillets, 1¼ inches thick
- ½ cup pitted kalamata olives, sliced thin

1. Cut away peel and pith from oranges. Quarter oranges, then slice thin crosswise. Combine orange slices and their juice, sliced fennel, 2 tablespoons oil, vinegar, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in bowl. Transfer salad to platter.

2. Pat salmon dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook salmon until well browned and temperature registers 125 degrees, 4 to 6 minutes per side. Transfer salmon to platter with salad. Sprinkle olives over salad and fennel fronds over both. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Add the olives just before serving so they don't discolor the salad.

30-MINUTE SUPPER

FLANK STEAK WITH PEANUT SLAW

30-MINUTE SUPPER

ROASTED CHICKEN THIGHS
WITH CREAMED SHALLOTS AND BACON

30-MINUTE SUPPER

SKILLET PORK CHOPS
WITH APPLES AND MAPLE-SAGE BUTTER

30-MINUTE SUPPER

PENNE WITH BUTTERNUT SQUASH
AND BROWN BUTTER SAUCE

ROASTED CHICKEN THIGHS WITH CREAMED SHALLOTS AND BACON Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Browning the chicken in a skillet on the stovetop and then finishing it on a baking sheet in the oven leaves the skillet free for caramelizing the shallots.

- **8 (5- to 7-ounce) bone-in chicken thighs, trimmed**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **1 tablespoon vegetable oil**
- **4 slices bacon, cut into 1-inch pieces**
- **8 shallots, peeled and halved lengthwise**
- **½ cup brandy**
- **¼ cup water**
- **½ cup heavy cream**
- **1 tablespoon minced fresh thyme**

1. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with foil. Pat chicken dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook chicken, skin side down, until well browned, about 8 minutes. Transfer chicken to prepared sheet, skin side up, and roast until chicken registers 175 degrees, 15 to 20 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, pour off fat from skillet. Add bacon and cook over medium heat until crisp, 6 to 8 minutes. Using slotted spoon, transfer bacon to paper towel–lined plate. Add shallots to now-empty skillet, cut side down. Cover and cook until well browned, about 3 minutes. Off heat, add brandy and water. Return skillet to heat and cook, covered, until shallots are tender, about 5 minutes.

3. Stir in cream and thyme and simmer, uncovered, until thickened, about 3 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer creamed shallots to serving platter, arrange chicken on top, and sprinkle with bacon. Serve.

FLANK STEAK WITH PEANUT SLAW Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: We reserve a portion of the slaw's peanut dressing and reduce it to make an intense sauce for the steak.

- **5 tablespoons peanut oil**
- **¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro**
- **2 tablespoons crunchy peanut butter**
- **4 teaspoons packed brown sugar**
- **1 tablespoon soy sauce**
- **2 teaspoons grated fresh ginger**
- **1 teaspoon grated lime zest plus ¼ cup juice (2 limes)**
- **1 (14-ounce) bag coleslaw mix**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **1 (2-pound) flank steak, trimmed**

1. Whisk ¼ cup oil, cilantro, peanut butter, sugar, soy sauce, ginger, and lime zest and juice together in large bowl until emulsified. Set aside ¼ cup dressing. Toss coleslaw mix with remaining ½ cup dressing to coat. Season with salt to taste; set aside.

2. Cut steak lengthwise with grain into 3 equal pieces. Pat pieces dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook steaks until well browned and meat registers 125 degrees (for medium-rare), 5 to 7 minutes per side. Transfer to carving board, tent with foil, and let rest for 5 minutes.

3. Combine ¼ cup water with reserved dressing in now-empty skillet and simmer over medium-low heat until thickened slightly, about 2 minutes, scraping up any browned bits. Slice steaks thin on bias against grain and drizzle with sauce. Serve with slaw.

PENNE WITH BUTTERNUT SQUASH AND BROWN BUTTER SAUCE Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Covering the squash speeds up its cooking while still allowing for browning.

- **1 pound penne, fusilli, or other short, tubular pasta**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **1 tablespoon olive oil**
- **1 pound butternut squash, peeled, seeded, and cut into ½-inch pieces (3 cups)**
- **2 tablespoons fresh sage leaves, torn**
- **3 garlic cloves, minced**
- **4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces**
- **¼ cup hazelnuts, toasted, skinned, and chopped coarse**
- **1 tablespoon lemon juice**
- **2 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (1 cup)**

1. Bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add pasta and 1 tablespoon salt to boiling water and cook, stirring often, until al dente. Reserve ½ cup cooking water, then drain pasta and return it to pot.

2. Heat oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add squash, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper. Cover and cook until squash is softened and browned, about 5 minutes. Add sage and garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds; add squash mixture to pasta.

3. Add butter and hazelnuts to now-empty skillet and cook over medium-high heat until both are browned and fragrant, about 2 minutes. Remove skillet from heat and stir in lemon juice and ¼ cup reserved cooking water (butter will foam and sizzle). Stir hazelnut mixture and ½ cup Parmesan into pasta and season with salt and pepper to taste. Adjust consistency with remaining reserved cooking water as needed. Serve, sprinkled with remaining ½ cup Parmesan.

SKILLET PORK CHOPS WITH APPLES AND MAPLE-SAGE BUTTER Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: The fresh sage and maple syrup butter melts on the hot chops, forming a flavorful sauce without any extra cooking.

- **4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened, plus 1 tablespoon unsalted butter**
- **2 tablespoons maple syrup**
- **1 tablespoon minced fresh sage**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **4 (6- to 8-ounce) boneless pork chops, ¾ to 1 inch thick, trimmed**
- **2 Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored, halved, and cut into ½-inch-thick wedges**
- **1 red onion, halved and sliced thin**
- **1 tablespoon red wine vinegar**

1. Combine softened butter, 1 tablespoon maple syrup, sage, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in bowl; set aside. Pat chops dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Melt remaining 1 tablespoon butter in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat. Cook chops until well browned and meat registers 140 degrees, about 5 minutes per side. Transfer to platter and tent with foil.

2. Pour off all but 1 tablespoon fat from skillet. Add apples, onion, and ¼ teaspoon salt and cook, covered, over medium-high heat until softened, about 6 minutes. Stir in vinegar and remaining 1 tablespoon maple syrup and cook, uncovered, until apples start to brown, 2 to 4 minutes.

3. Stir any accumulated pork juices into apple-onion mixture and spoon around chops. Dollop chops with maple-sage butter. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: You can also use Gala or Fuji apples here.

THE GREAT AMERICAN CAKE

B-52 Cake

It's bombs away with this spirited cake, a riff on the popular drink of layered liqueurs. The cake features layers of brownie, light Bailey's mousse, and Grand Marnier gelatin.

To make this cake, you will need:

- **1 recipe Basic Brownies batter***
- **2½ teaspoons unflavored gelatin**
- **1 tablespoon water**
- **6 ounces white chocolate, chopped**
- **½ cup Bailey's Irish Cream**
- **1½ teaspoons instant espresso powder**
- **1¼ cups heavy cream, chilled**
- **1 cup orange juice**
- **2 tablespoons sugar**
- **2 tablespoons Grand Marnier**
- **Bittersweet chocolate curls***

FOR THE BASE: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Grease 9-inch springform pan. Pour brownie batter into pan and bake until toothpick inserted in center comes out with few crumbs attached, 22 to 27 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking. Transfer pan to wire rack and let cool completely.

FOR THE FILLING: Combine 1 teaspoon gelatin and water in small bowl and let stand until gelatin softens, about 5 minutes. Place white chocolate in large bowl. Heat Bailey's and espresso powder in small saucepan over medium heat until just simmering. Pour Bailey's mixture over white chocolate, add gelatin mixture, and whisk until melted; let cool slightly, about 5 minutes. Using stand mixer fitted with whisk, whip cream on medium-low speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase speed to high and whip until soft peaks form, 1 to 3 minutes. Whisk one-third of whipped cream into white chocolate mixture. Using spatula, fold in remaining whipped cream. Spread evenly over brownie layer in pan. Refrigerate until set, about 2 hours.

FOR THE TOPPING: Combine orange juice, sugar, Grand Marnier, and remaining 1½ teaspoons gelatin in small saucepan and cook over medium-high heat, stirring frequently, until just simmering. Transfer to 2-cup liquid measuring cup and let cool completely, about 1 hour. Slowly pour juice mixture over cake and refrigerate until set, about 1 hour. Run thin knife between cake and side of pan; remove side of pan. Transfer cake to cake platter. Place chocolate curls in center of cake. Serve.

*Find our **Basic Brownies** recipe and learn how to make chocolate curls at **cookscountry.com/nov15**.

Inside This Issue

Wisconsin Butter Burgers 5

Spinach Salad with Pear 7

Brussels Sprout Gratin 22

Five Easy Breakfast Scrambles 29

Cranberry Pound Cake 14

Spaghetti Squash Salad 11

Baked Mustard Chicken 12

Pork and Ricotta Meatballs 7

Pork Chops with Apples RC

Italian Steak Modiga 17

Two-Hour Turkey and Gravy 19

Quick Beef and Vegetable Soup RC

Deep-Dish Apple Pie 25

Puffy Tacos 9

Chicken-Corn Soup 10

Cornmeal Drop Biscuits 23

Chicken Tetrazzini for Two 26

Sourdough Dressing 20

Shrimp Creole 13

Bratwurst Reuben RC

Salmon with Fennel Salad RC

Chocolate-Cherry Brownies 15

Slow-Cooker Chicken with Garlic 28

Candied Sweet Potatoes 21

Flank Steak with Peanut Slaw RC